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**Landscapes of Mining and Agriculture  
in Western Kentucky**

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**Landscapes of Mining and Agriculture  
in Western Kentucky**

by

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**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2014

## **Acknowledgements**

Many individuals and organizations have provided support for the completion of this dissertation. I am grateful to my co-supervisors, Elizabeth Engelhardt and Steven Hoelscher, who provided crucial encouragement and feedback at all stages of the project, from development of the idea through final formatting. My other committee members, William Doolittle, Erika Bsumek, and Jeffrey Meikle, also gave valuable insight and suggestions throughout the dissertation process.

I am grateful to have been the recipient of a 2011-2012 Endowed Continuing University Fellowship from the University of Texas at Austin. The College of Liberal Arts and the Department of American Studies both provided research and professional development funding at key points during my graduate career. Thanks also to the Kentucky Historical Society, where I held a 2011-2012 Scholarly Research Fellowship.

Many thanks to the participants, discussants, and organizers of the 2011 Workshop for the History of Environment, Agriculture, Technology and Science (WHEATS), held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the 2011 Harvard University Energy History Workshop. I left both workshops with useful feedback and inspiration. Thanks to the faculty, students, and visiting scholars involved in the Graduate Portfolio Program in Sustainability, who provided feedback on the project at both its early and late stages. Conversations and discussant comments in sessions at the annual meetings of the Association of American Geographers, Agricultural History Society, and Southwestern



This dissertation would not have been possible without access to the local history room at the Union County Public Library in Morganfield, Kentucky. Many thanks also to the farmers who allowed me to walk their fields and observe the landscape. Very big thanks to my parents, Rankin and Dolly Powell, who have been tireless in their support of me during this project, as they have been during all of my projects.

# **Landscapes of Mining and Agriculture in Western Kentucky**

Lisa Jordan Powell, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Though mining and agriculture have always shared a function in producing energy, for machines and for human and animal consumption, respectively, landscapes containing and created by the two practices have been worlds apart in the popular imagination. As a place where large-scale commercial agriculture and underground coal mining exist side-by-side and one-on-top-of-the-other, Union County in Western Kentucky can be confusing for those who have experienced both only through the filters of mass news media, films, books, and music. Yet, it is a place where food production and fuel production have coexisted for centuries and where there is no indication that either will cease in the near future. This dissertation introduces the concept of the *hybrid energy landscape*, a physical and cultural space in which food is produced as an energy source in addition to mechanical fuels. In such a landscape, of which Union County is a primary example, competition for land use can result in both conflicts and negotiations, which this dissertation explores. As many of current proposals for alternative strategies to meet resource needs involve producing food and fuel in shared spaces, Union County provides a valuable case study of such a hybrid energy landscape that has been functioning and developing for 200 years.

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction—</b>	
<b>Entering Union County's Hybrid Energy Landscape.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Foundations of the Hybrid Energy Landscape—</b>	
<b>Building Farms and Mines.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Chapter 3: A Disrupted Landscape—</b>	
<b>Camp Breckinridge and its Legacy in Union County.....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Lining up the Landscape—</b>	
<b>New Infrastructure for Coal and Corn.....</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Reconciling Identities—</b>	
<b>Corn and Coal in Celebration and Naming.....</b>	<b>219</b>
<b>Chapter 6: The Contemporary Hybrid Energy Landscape—</b>	
<b>Negotiations and Innovations.....</b>	<b>274</b>
<b>Conclusion: An Enduring Landscape.....</b>	<b>296</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>300</b>

## **Chapter 1: Introduction—Entering Union County's Hybrid Energy Landscape**

From most of the roads on which one can drive into Union County, Kentucky, the first thing one sees after crossing the county line is a corn field. In some years or seasons, the fields might contain soybeans or wheat, and there might be beef cattle in a pasture on a nearby rise, but without exception the land is visibly dedicated to agriculture. Driving deeper into the county, these fields, along with farm houses, barns, equipment sheds, grain bins, and other agricultural infrastructure, dominate the view on both sides of the road. Agribusinesses, including fertilizer suppliers, seed dealers, and a sprawling John Deere sales and service center, compose much of the commercial development at the edges of the county's towns, and the grain and equipment storage facilities of some individual farms are large enough that they seem to be businesses rather than private operations. The importance of agriculture to the economy and daily lives of the population is immediately and near-constantly visible all around Union County.

Coal mining is also a visible part of the county's landscape. Because of Union County's gently rolling and flat topography and lack of four-lane roads, there are no road or highway overpasses. Yet metal-covered coal conveyor belt lines pass over most of the county's major, and many of the lesser, roads, and stretch for miles through fields and patches of forest on either side. Mine entrances and coal processing facilities sit back from the roads but are visible from them, as their structures tower above the surrounding crops. The highest hills in the county are not natural geological features but rather mounds of coal processing waste, some of which have been coaxed into supporting thin

vegetative cover, but are noticeably supporting less growth than the rest of the land. Along the Ohio River at Uniontown, the county's primary port, loading docks for coal barges flank the grain truck dumping and barge loading area both up- and downstream. There are not hard, visible boundaries between the areas of coal production and the areas of corn production in Union County; rather, the two together define the county's landscape (Figures 1.1 and 1.2).



*Figure 1.1: A recently harvested corn field surrounding an area where coal is brought out of a mine.*



*Figure 1.2: Just outside of Uniontown, Kentucky, a coal conveyor belt line for the Riverview Mine passing across a highway between farm fields, with grain storage bins in the background.*

I grew up on a farm roughly a mile from the Union County border, in neighboring Henderson County. Through my childhood and teens, I had a very intimate relationship with the raising of crops in our area and a seemingly distant one with the mines. As a tot, I tagged along with my dad on seed company-sponsored field days to see test plots of new crop varieties and look at exemplary fields of crops, which were often in Union County. I had no illusions in regards to farming being both business and science—at around nine years old I was allotted a hundred bushels of corn that I had to decide when to market, which involved a week of daily calls to the elevator to check prices and stress over the few cents per bushel daily storage fees that kept racking up until I decided to sell. I partnered with a fertilizer company to conduct yield trials as part of my first big

research science fair projects in junior high, and during the summer between high school and college I worked as a corn pollinator for a seed company that was also using genetic engineering to develop herbicide resistant varieties.

Mining, in my youthful experience, was something apart. It was a volatile industry which periodically left some of my classmates' dads out of work for months at a time due to layoffs, and left a woman living in a house down the road a widow when her husband was killed in a mine explosion in neighboring Webster County. It was only once our farm house started suffering the effects of subsidence from an underground mine with its entrance in Union County, and coal particulates started settling out of the well water coming out of our faucets, that I began to understand that what was happening under the ground and what was happening on the ground were very much connected.

Once I began looking around, particularly in Union County, I realized that visually it was often hard to tell where the farming ended and the mining began. From a distance, the huge concrete silos used to store coal at a preparation plant were indistinguishable from those at the elevator where we delivered our corn. For most of my young life, I had assumed that they, too, held grain. When tugboats pushed their loads on the river, I had to squint to determine whether barges were piled with coal or with corn until they came very close. Friends who visited from out of town found the landscape even more confusing; they were astonished to see the half-pipe shaped metal tunnels covering conveyor belts crossing over roads and stretching across fields. Knowing the beltlines had to be transporting something, and seeing fields of corn every

way they turned, the out-of-towners assumed they carried grain, when actually they were used exclusively to move coal.

Though mining and agriculture have always shared a function in producing energy, for machines and for human and animal consumption, respectively, landscapes containing and created by the two practices have been worlds apart in the popular imagination. As a place where large-scale commercial agriculture and underground coal mining exist side-by-side and one-on-top-of-the-other, Union County can be confusing for those who have experienced both only through the filters of mass news media, films, books, and music. Yet, it is a place where food production and fuel production have coexisted for nearly 200 years, and where there is no indication that either will cease in the near future.

Union County is contained in the Western Coalfields physiographic region of Kentucky, and is hyper-representative of the overlaying of grain farming and coal mining across this region, as it has been consistently at or near the top of the counties of the region in production output of both for decades. The 363-square-mile county has gently rolling hills and flat bottom lands bordered by the Ohio River to its north and Tradewater River to its west. The main crop of the county's farms, all of which are family-owned, is corn, and in every year since 1969 it has led all of Kentucky in both total bushels produced, and often also in bushel per acre yields; it has similarly often led in soybean and wheat production. The mining has long been primarily underground, and now has occurred or is occurring under over half the county, with ongoing expansion; in 2012



Union became Kentucky's top coal producing county.<sup>1</sup> For over two centuries, the practices of coal mining and grain farming have forged a constantly evolving hybrid landscape of energy production. Written in this landscape are narratives of progress, prosperity, loss and change that have accompanied its formation.

Early in the twenty-first century, at a moment when interest in the provenance of one's food has become a national fetish, and when the push for alternatives to fossil fuels has reached a frenzy, it might at first seem that a place like Union County is behind the times. For the most dogmatic among those dedicated to reshaping both food systems and fuel sourcing, stretches of hundred-acre field after hundred-acre field of corn, soybeans, and wheat, and load after load of coal emerging from the depths below, are the very scenes they would like to see eradicated from the United States. Yet, Union County provides a rich case study of the past and present, and a potentially enlightening model for the future, of food and fuel energy production in the U.S.. Systems being advocated as parts of sustainability initiatives involve sites where food and fuel production share physical space; this has long been the case in Union County, and understanding how the shared space has been negotiated in the past can help shed insight onto how such areas of overlapping energy production might be negotiated in the future. Despite the rallying cry of their opponents, neither large-scale grain farming nor underground coal mining are likely to be totally eliminated as food and fuel sources for at least several generations.

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1 Kentucky Office of USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service, access portal at [http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/Kentucky/index.asp](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Kentucky/index.asp); USDA Census of Agriculture Historical Archive, access portal at <http://agcensus.mannlib.cornell.edu/AgCensus/>; *Kentucky Coal Facts, 13<sup>th</sup> ed.*, published by the Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet, Department for Energy Development and Independence, in partnership with the Kentucky Coal Association (2013).

Both farming and mining have historically been highly susceptible to vacillations in markets and the whims of nature, resulting in instabilities and even extinction in communities depending on them. While it has experienced its share of ups and downs, Union County has also displayed a resiliency and adaptability that has resulted in sustained and relatively stable intertwined communities of production. Thus Union County can provide insight on developing a very localized version of sustainability over time.

### ***Defining the hybrid energy landscape***

Producing sources of energy has been at the center of Union County's human interactions with the physical environment for two centuries. Many scholars have traced and argued for the centrality of energy to human history and the development of contemporary American civilization as we know it. Some, particularly ecologists and interdisciplinary historians like Alfred Crosby, take a very holistic view of energy that includes the conversion of solar energy into food through plants as well as fuels used to power machines, but in most non-biological historical and geographical scholarship, “energy” refers solely to mechanical fuels.<sup>2</sup> This dissertation considers both Union County's coal and corn production over time as production of energy, but acknowledges

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2 R.P. Sieferle, “The Energy System – A Basic Concept of Environmental History” in Peter Brimblecombe and Christian Pfister, eds., *The Silent Countdown: Essays in European Environmental History* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990) 9-20; David Nye, *Consuming Power: A Social History of American Energies* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998); Alfred Crosby, *Children of the Sun: A History of Humanity's Unappeasable Appetite for Energy* (New York: Norton, 2006). In early human history, when mechanical power was human muscle power, there was no distinction between food and fuel.

that, despite overlaps, the two have largely been considered in American culture in the nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries as part of separate fuel and food systems.

Though it is hard to pinpoint the exact origin of the term “energy landscape” and the related “landscapes of energy,” Martin Pasqualetti has certainly been a progenitor in the fields of geography and its allied social and physical sciences of both the idea of looking at energy from a landscape perspective and of bringing “energy landscape” into geographical discourse. While much of Pasqualetti's work has concerned renewable and alternative sources of energy such as geothermal, solar, and wind, he refers broadly to sites where fuel for machines is extracted and processed as “energy landscapes.”<sup>3</sup>

Matthew Huber summarized Pasqualetti's energy landscape idea as it has been adopted by geographers as “a particular way to really understand the diverse materialities of energy resources and how they necessarily create these very specific forms of imprints on landscapes.”<sup>4</sup> Other scholarship in geography and related fields has been aligned with Pasqualetti in applying the term “energy landscape” only to areas involved in the production of mechanical fuel.<sup>5</sup>

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3 Martin Pasqualetti, “Reading the Changing Energy Landscape” in Sven Stremke and Andy van den Dobbelsteen, eds., *Sustainable Energy Landscapes: Designing, Planning, and Development* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2013); Martin Pasqualetti, “Land Requirements for the Solar and Coal Options” *The Geographical Journal* 150 (1984) 192-212; Martin Pasqualetti, “Morality, Space, and the Power of Wind-Energy Landscapes” *Geographical Review* 90 (2000) 381-394; Martin Pasqualetti, “Social Barriers to Renewable Energy Landscapes” *Geographical Review* 101 (2011) 201-223; Pasqualetti, Martin “The Alberta Oil Sands from Both Sides of the Border” *Geographical Review* 99 (2009) 248-267.

4 Matthew Huber. “Introduction to Martin Pasqualetti's plenary lecture for the Energy and Environment Specialty Group ‘The Changing Energy Landscapes of North America,’ “ at the Association of American Geographers meeting, Los Angeles, CA, delivered 11 April 2013.

5 e.g. Other essays in Sven Stremke and Andy van den Dobbelsteen, eds., *Sustainable Energy*

Landscape provides an ideal framework for examining the narratives of production of energy sources in Union County. Landscape, as a concept, is rooted in the visual appearance of rural areas, and over its long tradition, the study of landscape has been greatly concerned with what we can see by looking around us.<sup>6</sup> A landscape is given meaning based not only on how people physically interact with it but also how people see it. Much of the perceptions of both farming and mining by those not directly involved in them involve visual images of landscapes. For farming, even if one moves beyond the idealized diversified small farm to the reality of contemporary large-scale grain production, then delightful rural images of fields of green and gold, disturbed only by the occasional barn, grain bin, or chugging tractor are still dominant. Images of mining, whether underground or surface, remain industrial, barren, dark, and dirty. If the surroundings of coal mines are scenic, they are seen as steep mountains on which few crops can be grown.<sup>7</sup> In Union County, farming and mining occur in the same landscape,

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*Landscapes: Designing, Planning, and Development* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2013); Bernd Moller, "Spatial Analyses of Emerging and Fading Wind Energy Landscapes in Denmark" *Land Use Policy* 27 (2010): 233-241; Carly-Ann Marie Anderson, "McFadden, Wyoming: A Case Study in Narrating our Changing Energy Landscapes." Order No. 1516745, University of Wyoming, 2012. <http://ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1037999353?accountid=7118>; Shirley A. Hall, "Places of Power: An Exploration of a Wind Energy Landscape." Order No. MR60408, University of Guelph (Canada), 2010. <http://ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/276379148?accountid=7118>; Alain Nadaï & Dan van der Horst, "Introduction: Landscapes of Energies," *Landscape Research* 35 (2010) 143-155 ; Jones, Chrisptoher. *Energy Landscapes: Coal Canals, Oil Pipelines, Electricity Transmission Wires in the Mid-Atlantic, 1820-1930*. Publicly accessible Penn Dissertations. Paper 16. 2009. <http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/16> .

- 6 "Landscape" in Derek Gregory et al, eds., *The Dictionary of Human Geography 5<sup>th</sup> Edition* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); D.W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); John Stilgoe, *Landscape and Images* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005); J.B. Jackson and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).
- 7 J.B. Jackson, "An Engineered Environment" in *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*; Richard Francaviglia, *Hard Places: Reading the Landscapes of America's Historic Mining Districts* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press) 1997; Peter Goin, and Elizabeth Raymond. "Recycled Landscapes:

inviting the question of how these visual stereotypes must be reconsidered in such a place. All of the agricultural and mining development in Union County has resulted in changes in what one sees when one looks around the county, and so close examination is essential for understanding it.

In his pivotal 1925 essay, “The Morphology of Landscape,” Carl Sauer helped to move the study of landscape to the center of the field of geography, and to expand its definition out from the visual to human-environment interactions, as “an area made up of a distinct association of forms, both physical and cultural.”<sup>8</sup> Building on Sauer's foundations, geographers have provided systematic methods from how to observe and culturally interpret landscapes, and many long-established methods still provide key entry points to understanding landscapes today. The importance of landscape to understanding the human cultures that are part of it is summarized by Pierce Lewis, who in outlining his “axioms” for reading landscapes, noted “landscape is our unwitting autobiography.”<sup>9</sup>

In the 1980s and early 90s, the “new cultural geographers,” including Dennis Cosgrove and James and Nancy Duncan, expanded the study of landscape by incorporating cultural theory and concern for the mutual shaping of landscapes and social

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Mining's Legacies in the Mesabi Iron Range,” in David Nye, ed., *Technologies of Landscape: From Reaping to Recycling* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).

8 Carl Ortwin Sauer, “The Morphology of Landscape (1925)” in John Leighly, ed., *Land and Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963) 315-350. It is worth noting that some of Sauer's thoughts on landscape may have been formed as he studied the “Pennyroyal” area of Kentucky, which surrounds the Western Coalfields region on all sides except what is bounded by the Ohio River. Sauer worked between 1920 and 1925 on the preparation of the Kentucky Geological Survey volume *Geography of the Pennyroyal: A Study of the Influence of Geology and Physiography upon the Industry, Commerce and Life of the People*, in which he comparatively discusses the Western Coalfields.

9 Pierce Lewis “Axioms for Reading the Landscape” in Meinig, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*.

and political processes.<sup>10</sup> Don Mitchell furthered these ideas by emphasizing how landscapes are produced in two ways, by labor that is organized at scales from the local to the global, and in the “re-presentation of the products of labor as a landscape,” which he views as obscuring the power struggles and disorder involved in the appropriation of that labor. He notes that Sauer’s “morphological landscape...develops as both a product of and a means for guiding the social and spatial practices of production and reproduction in an area.”<sup>11</sup> The Union County landscape consists not only of the visible physical features on the ground, but also in the human labor, conflicts, and negotiations that have interacted with and constructed those features. Understanding this landscape is understanding these cultural and social processes.

In the past two decades, scholars have continued to rethink landscape and sought an even deeper integration of human culture and the physical environment in the concept. Tim Ingold in particular has conceptualized landscape through “dwelling,” in which multiple generations of people inhabit and move within a landscape over time, not only acting on the landscape but with it, changing it as they are being changed.<sup>12</sup> The landscape of energy production in Union County has formed as part of a process of mutual constitution over time of human culture and physical space

Energy landscapes have been considered visually and as sites of social, political,

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10 Dennis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); James Duncan and Nancy Duncan, “(Re)reading the landscape” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 6 (1988) 117-126.

11 Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land : Migrant Workers and the California Landscape*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

12 Tim Ingold, *The perception of the Environment: Essays on livelihood, dwelling, and skill* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 191-194.

and cultural conflict and negotiation. Without reaching into the realm of consumption, which would situate nearly the entire American landscape as an “energy landscape,” this dissertation defines an energy landscape as a landscape including locations of and infrastructure surrounding raw materials for extraction, processing, and transportation of energy. Because of the scholarly history of the term “energy landscape” applying only to landscapes involving mechanical fuels, the inclusion of agricultural crops into the analysis of Union county energy landscapes cannot be taken for granted. Throughout the remainder of this dissertation, unless otherwise noted, “energy” and “energy sources” refer both to coal, oil, natural gas and other mechanical fuels, and agricultural crops as food that fuels both humans and animals. Both of these energy sources are very much based in geologic and environmental qualities of the physical ground. In Union County, the development of these two energy sources has not existed in separate vacuums, but rather has been intertwined over time into what can be considered a hybrid energy landscape. Incorporating “hybrid” extends the idea of an energy landscape beyond the focus on mechanical fuels to include farm fields and the infrastructure associated with growing and transporting the raw materials of energy they produce.

Hybridity has taken hold as a key concept in both studies of human-environment interactions and human-technology interactions. Sarah Whatmore, in conceptualizing her version of “hybrid geographies,” explains that “The spatial vernacular of such geographies is fluid, not flat, unsettling the coordinates of distance and proximity; local and global; inside and outside.” Her application of hybridity encourages both looking

beyond territorialization of areas and at the “socio-material” processes that both lead to and transcend such partitioning.<sup>13</sup> This notion of hybridity encourages us to look at landscapes that blur and disturb divisions based on use, ownership, and history, such as landscapes shared by fuel and food production. In Andrew Jamison's conceptualization, “hybridity” is not only a mixing and melding of heterogeneous entities which have been historically and dominantly considered part of separate worlds, but also a way of contradicting both the perception and reality of scientific and technological “hubris,” in which new developments have steamrolled both human cultures and the environment.<sup>14</sup> This approach of hybridity opens the possibility for the consideration of negotiations of landscapes when radical new technologies, such as new mining equipment, are introduced onto land that has long been agricultural.<sup>15</sup>

Even without the explicit inclusion of both food and fuel into the concept of a hybrid energy landscape, the line between the two has long been blurred. Ongoing and aggressive research seeks to improve the nationwide commercial viability of mechanical biofuels such as ethanol and soy biodiesel that can be produced from cultivated crops. Despite rarely standing on its own at a fueling station, ethanol is already a common component of the fuel pumped at most gas stations, and many farmers go out of their way

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13 Sarah Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies: natures cultures spaces* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 6.

14 Andrew Jamison, Steen Hyldgaard Christensen, Lars Botin, *A Hybrid Imagination: Science and Technology in Cultural Perspective* (San Rafael, CA: Morgan & Claypool Publishers, 2011).

15 Note that environmental historians Mark Fiege and Richard White have employed the idea of the hybrid landscape in describing areas in which the “natural” and “man-made” aspects of the landscape are so deeply intertwined as to be almost indistinguishable. See Mark Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999) and Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).



to buy soy diesel to fuel the tractors and combines that cultivate and harvest their soybean crops. Fossil fuels have also been part of the foods we eat for decades. Coal tar based dyes like Yellow #5 are found in foods on the shelves of most grocery stores. These overlaps only reinforce the need to include hybridity in the study of energy landscapes.

Recurring throughout the history of Union County's hybrid energy landscape are conflicts and negotiations over the land and its use. Some of these power struggles have occurred directly between farmers and mining companies; while there have been instances in which a clear winner and a clear loser emerged from these conflicts, the dominant trend has been resolution through negotiation, in which a long-term solution is found which satisfies both sides. Through these negotiations, both production systems developed the landscape and each other. The most enduring and in some cases unresolved of the land conflicts have been between farmer-landowners and agencies of the U.S. government, whose actions either ultimately indirectly or directly came to involve mineral extraction in the county. While the term "eminent domain" has not always been at the center of the discourse surrounding these conflicts over land in Union County, it has been at the foundation of them.

The idea that the government should have a right to take private land for its use was adopted into the nascent United States from English Common Law; however, in the early years of independence the importance of private property and preventing undue infringement upon it by the government was asserted by James Madison and other leaders. While still acknowledging that the common good might at times require the

taking of private property, the last clause of the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution, or “Takings Clause,” was added to limit this power to takings only for “public use” and only with “just compensation.”<sup>16</sup> This vague language has resulted in near-endless debate in courts and among lawmakers, as well as near-endless analysis among legal and economic scholars. In their battles against and surrounding eminent domain, Union Countians have both questioned the interpretation of “public good”—whether the government’s intended use for the land would actually provide more public benefit than the private landowner’s use of it, and whether the intended use was a “public good” at all—and the financial reality of “just compensation,” in fighting for what they believed were fair payments for their land and its improvements and natural resources. Union Countians have also questioned the basic applicability of eminent domain and the powers of particular government agencies and their contractors to use it. Much of Union County’s hybrid energy landscape has been formed both through the use of eminent domain and resistance to it.

### ***Union County in regional context***

In addition to Union County, Kentucky’s Western Coalfields physiographic region contains adjoining Henderson and Webster Counties, in addition to all of Butler, Daviess, Grayson, Hancock, Hopkins, McLean, Muhlenberg, and Ohio Counties. The region also

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16 U.S. Constitution, Amendment V; Thomas Miceli, *The Economic Theory of Eminent Domain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). See also: Robin Paul Malloy, *Private Property, Community Development, and Eminent Domain* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008); Ellen Frankel Paul, *Property Rights and Eminent Domain* (New Brunswick, CT: Transaction Books, 1987).

contains portions of Breckinridge, Christian, Edmonson, Hart, Logna, Todd, and Warren Counties. Union County and its Western Coalfields neighbors sit at a unique geological and cultural intersection. The Western Coalfields region lies in the Eastern Interior Basin, one of a handful of major coal-yielding areas in the continental United States. The Eastern Interior Basin also lies under southeastern Indiana and most of Illinois south of Chicago. Kentucky's Eastern Coalfields region lies in the geologically distinct Appalachian Basin, separated from Western Kentucky by an area of Central Kentucky without notable coal production. All of the Eastern Interior coal is bituminous, and essentially homogeneous across the basin, in terms of its chemical properties, but the Western Kentucky coal has slightly higher BTU value than that in Illinois and Indiana. Coal throughout the basin is higher in sulfur than Eastern Kentucky coal, though coal in both regions has sulfur content that is significantly higher than that of coal mined in the Western United States.<sup>17</sup>

Kentucky's Western Coalfields region shares not only coal geology with the parts of the Eastern Interior Basin in Illinois and Indiana. The topography of most of the Basin is similar, consisting mainly of flat and gently rolling land, much of which has fertile topsoil. In part because of the capability of the land to support profitable commercial agriculture, the Eastern Interior Basin has historically had a more stable economy than the Appalachian coal-producing region. Union County farmers have long been part of

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17 Curtis Harvey, *The Western Kentucky Coal Industry in 1974: An Economic Analysis* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Institute for Mining and Materials Research, 1975); Robert Noyes, ed., *Coal Resources, Characteristics and Ownership in the U.S.A.* (Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes Data Corporation, 1978).

this stable, agriculture-based economy, and many have accumulated substantial wealth and land holdings. For much of the late nineteenth and early-to-mid twentieth centuries, railroads provided decent transportation for commodities throughout the Eastern Interior; however, the rail systems across Illinois and Indiana both existed prior to and have lasted beyond those in Western Kentucky, where river transportation was dominant prior to the late-1800s and has been dominant since the mid-1900s.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the connections across the river to the rest of the Basin, the Western Coalfields are still culturally and politically firmly tied to Kentucky. Though the two coal regions of the Commonwealth include vastly different topographies, economies, and cultural histories, they fall under the same umbrella of Kentucky government policy and the same popular images attached to the idea of “mining in Kentucky.” Eastern Kentucky has defined the dominant popular narrative of coal mining in the Commonwealth.<sup>19</sup> The roughness of the mountains and the people, as well as the exploitation of both by coal corporations, have been dramatized nationally and internationally. From the reports of writers such as Theodore Dreiser and John Dos Passos who flocked to “Bloody Harlan” in the 1930s, to ongoing covers of folk songs like Florence Reece's “Which Side Are You On?” to the films *Coal Miner's Daughter* and *Harlan County USA*, to Erik Reece's essay on mountaintop removal mining for *Harper's* and subsequent book, *Lost Mountain: A Year in the Vanishing Wilderness*, to Diane Sawyer's 2009 television special “A Hidden

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18 Harvey, *The Western Kentucky Coal Industry*; Noyes, *Coal Resources*.

19 Kentucky, along with Virginia, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania, are “commonwealths” rather than “states.” Though the term has no real legal bearing, this distinction is particularly valued in Kentuckian culture, and I will refer to Kentucky as a “commonwealth” except when a direct quote uses the word “state.”

America: Children of the Mountains,” coal mining in Kentucky has been portrayed as a dirty, deadly, and debilitating to both the land and human individuals and communities. All of these cultural productions were based entirely on events in Appalachia, but have stood as representative of all of Kentucky.

A rare popular representation of Kentucky coal mining that is firmly situated in the Western Coalfields is John Prine's song, “Paradise,” which includes the lyrics:

When I was a child my family would travel  
Down to Western Kentucky where my parents were born  
And there's a backwards old town that's often remembered  
So many times that my memories are worn.

Chorus:  
And daddy won't you take me back to Muhlenberg County  
Down by the Green River where Paradise lay  
Well, I'm sorry my son, but you're too late in asking  
Mister Peabody's coal train has hauled it away

Then the coal company came with the world's largest shovel  
And they tortured the timber and stripped all the land  
Well, they dug for their coal till the land was forsaken  
Then they wrote it all down as the progress of man.<sup>20</sup>

With its “backwards” town and “stripped” and “forsaken” land, Prine's song essentially picks up the popular Eastern Kentucky narrative and places it on Western Kentucky, reinforcing it as the story of mining throughout Kentucky. Muhlenberg and Union Counties are the two most differentiated mining landscapes in the Western

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20 John Prine, “Paradise” from *John Prine* 1971, re-recorded for *German Afternoons*, 1986. In addition to the audience the song has received due to Prine's own popularity, covers of the song have also been recorded by Jimmy Buffet (2010), John Fogerty (2009), Dwight Yoakam (2004), Johnny Cash (1981, 2006), John Denver (1972), and others.

Coalfields region. Muhlenberg County has been extensively strip mined, and its landscape, despite reclamation efforts, will never fully recover; it has long been and will likely remain among the weakest counties agriculturally in the region in terms of cash receipts from farm products.<sup>21</sup> While some other counties in the Western Coalfields have large patches of land that have been strip mined, they maintain predominantly productive agricultural landscapes. The overall mining landscape of Western Kentucky is not one of steep mountains with their tops being lopped off, where the hyperbole that “all the land” has been stripped is actually close to the truth; it is, on the whole, a place where mining has altered the landscape but not wholly defined it.

Western Coalfields miners have followed the United Mine Workers of America and other labor organizations in national coal mining and general labor strikes, and have held occasional local and mine-specific strikes. There have been brief outbursts of violence associated with labor disputes. Nevertheless, the region has not been the site of the intense and prolonged labor unrest that has occurred and been dramatized in Eastern Kentucky.<sup>22</sup> The Western Coalfields have not been immune to mine accidents, the worst since the mid-twentieth century having occurred at the Williams Station Mine on the border of Union and Webster Counties, which claimed 10 lives in September 1989.

There has not, however, been the almost periodic frequency of mine tragedies resulting in

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21 National Agricultural Statistics Service—Kentucky Field Office, Bulletins and County Statistics Sheets. Available at [http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/Kentucky/Publications/State\\_Census\\_Summaries/Historical\\_Ag\\_Statistics](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Kentucky/Publications/State_Census_Summaries/Historical_Ag_Statistics)

22 Joe Daniel Carr, “Labor Conflict in the Eastern Kentucky Coal Fields” *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 47 (1973) 179-192; Michael Guillermin, *Face Boss: The Memoir of a Western Kentucky Coal Miner* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2009).

mass deaths that have occurred in Eastern Kentucky and industry its neighboring Appalachian states.<sup>23</sup>

The popular story of Kentucky agriculture is also not entirely representative of the Western Coalfields region, and especially not of Union County. Due to the Kentucky Derby, the lavish thoroughbred horse farm is the dominant image of farms in Kentucky. These horse farms, however, are concentrated in a few counties in Central Kentucky, and sparse to nonexistent throughout the rest of the state. Despite the presence of Ellis Park racetrack in Henderson County, there are fewer than a handful of profitable horse farms in the entire Western Coalfields region, and they are not a dominant feature of the landscape. The crop that has long been associated most with Kentucky is tobacco, though this has changed in the last decade with the end of the price support system. While not the dominant tobacco-producing area of the Commonwealth, tobacco has long been a significant part of the Western Coalfields agricultural economy, with Daviess and Christian counties often appearing on lists of Kentucky's top producers. Union County still produced some tobacco in the early twentieth century, but it differs from most Western Coalfields counties in that it now has produced essentially no tobacco for decades.<sup>24</sup>

The Western Coalfields Region holds most of Kentucky's strongest grain crop

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23 Mine Safety and Health Administration, "Historical Data on Mine Disasters in the United States." Available at <http://www.msha.gov/MSHAINFO/FactSheets/MSHAFCT8.HTM>.

24 National Agricultural Statistics Service—Kentucky Field Office, Bulletins and County Statistics Sheets. Available at [http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/Kentucky/Publications/State\\_Census\\_Summaries/Historical\\_Ag\\_Statistics/](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Kentucky/Publications/State_Census_Summaries/Historical_Ag_Statistics/).

producing counties, in Union, Christian, Daviess, and Henderson Counties. Among these, Union County stands out for its long dominance in corn production in the region and in Kentucky. These four counties typically trade off from year-to-year in which produces the most total bushels of soybeans and wheat and highest bushels per acre yields in the region and often in the whole Commonwealth. While Union County and some of its neighbors are exceptional for their high levels of productivity that invite comparisons to Iowa and nearby Illinois, their focus on row crop production is not entirely misrepresentative of Kentucky as a whole, as the Commonwealth has for decades consistently ranked in the top fifteen to twenty of all states in total corn, soybean, and wheat produced. The realities of Kentucky agriculture differ substantially from the images dominated by horse barns and tobacco plots.

### ***Seeking to understand Union County's hybrid energy landscape***

The central questions of this dissertation are how has Union County's hybrid landscape of energy production developed over the past two and a half centuries, and how have the competing demands on the land and other resources been negotiated by the energy producers in the agricultural and mining communities. My examination of these questions has borrowed background literature, approaches, and types of source material from several scholarly traditions, including environmental history, cultural geography, landscape studies, studies of identity performance from cultural geography and anthropology, and science and technology studies applied to sustainability. The dearth of



scholarly work on my geographic study area presented challenges but also provided an opportunity to tell and analyze stories that had not previously found their way into academic literature.

Chapter 2 traces the early history of the hybrid energy landscape development, looking at how early settler interactions with their environment, each other, and their government laid the foundation for the later hybrid energy landscape. From the earliest known occupation of the land by Native Americans, and from the first Euro-American settlers in the late eighteenth century, humans significantly altered the landscape as they sought to meet their energy production needs. As they began to produce enough for sale and trade, they developed and exploited early transportation systems for commodities to move through and out of the county, including wagon roads, steamboats, and railroads. Nineteenth-century expansion of both agriculture and mining in the county generated conflicts and necessitated negotiations over the use of the land.

Though the development of Union County's hybrid energy landscape has been an ongoing process, it has not been an uninterrupted march. Disruptions have figured heavily into the county's energy history, and Chapter 3 focuses on one of the most significant of these. In 1942, 33,000 acres of the county's land, most of it in agricultural use, and the oil and coal rights under it, were taken by the U.S. government for a World War II military training camp. This appropriation of 1/7 of the county's surface reshaped the hybrid energy landscape not only during the years of government ownership, but, perhaps even more dramatically, through the government's sale of it, which both

precipitated the opening of a new area of the county to coal mining and restructured what had been hundreds of small farms before the Camp into several dozen large-acreage tracts. The loss of homes, land, and mineral income suffered by those affected by the construction of Camp Breckinridge has been deeply felt at the personal level for over 70 years, and some of descendants of the original landowners continue to fight for justice. Despite the personal tragedies, the consolidation in the disposal of the Camp lands and mineral rights enabled the “growth” of the hybrid energy landscape in Union County.

The problem of transportation between mass quantities of raw energy sources and where they are converted into usable machine power is a centuries-old, dating at least back to the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain. As Union County's coal production moved farther inland at the same time the already limited rail infrastructure in the area was weakening, solutions were needed for moving coal across the county to the Ohio River for barge transportation. Chapter 4 examines the system of multi-mile coal conveyor beltlines that began to criss-cross the county in the early 1970s and related coal infrastructure, and how they interacted with the agricultural landscape.

Some of the challenges in negotiating Union County's hybrid energy landscape over the past several decades have involved questions of what the county wanted to “be,” in other words, its identity and how it was perceived by outsiders as a corn county, a coal county, or both. Chapter 5 explores these identity issues. The county has held tightly to its agricultural identity and has put the force of cultural celebration behind this identity since 1974, when it held its first Corn Festival. Through each of the annual festivals

since, the county has celebrated its status as Kentucky's top corn producing county and the ongoing importance of agriculture to its economy. Despite its differences from Eastern Kentucky, Union County's coal-producing identity is tied closely to that of Kentucky as a whole, and thus is affected by Commonwealth- and nation-wide questions about coal's history and its future. The controversy over the renaming of the University of Kentucky men's basketball dormitory to Wildcat Coal Lodge brought decades of struggle over mine labor, mine safety, and the environmental consequences of strip and Appalachian mountaintop removal mining to bear on a single word in the name of a relatively small building. While Union County has not been plagued by those issues in the same, violent way as other counties, the vitriol on both sides of the naming issue demonstrates that proclaiming coal identity can come with heavy burdens.

By the late 1970s, the hybrid energy landscape of Union County had taken a form very similar to what it possesses today, though forms of infrastructure for both agriculture and coal mining have continued to change and grow. Chapter 6 looks at this contemporary negotiated hybrid energy landscape. In addition to continuing to build the working corn and coal landscapes of the county, changing technologies and, in the case of the mines, changing points of extraction, have resulted in the presence of dormant infrastructure. Some of these structures are being brought out of dormancy, however, to serve new purposes far from their original. There have also been new attempts to site large acreage public and private projects in the county in the past few decades; the legacy of dispossession left by Camp Breckinridge has helped to shape how people in the county

have reacted to these efforts. While organic vegetable farms, solar panels, and other archetypal indicators of contemporary efforts at sustainability have not overrun Union County, the developments of the past several years indicate how county's own brand of sustainability, which involves the long history of and ongoing negotiations of the hybrid energy landscape, has taken shape.

This project has relied on several different types of source material, much of it particular to Union County, as well as my own participant observation. I have spent at least several months each year in Union County since beginning this project. This time has enabled me not only to closely observe the landscape, but also to learn about the community through being a part of it. While my family does not own farm land in Union County, two of our farms in Henderson and Webster Counties are in walking distance of the Union border. We raise corn, soybeans, and wheat on our land in partnership, for the purposes of having access to modern machinery, with a large family farm operation based out of Union County. Accordingly, we conduct much of our farm business, including the purchasing of seed and fertilizer, and the selling of grain at the elevator, in Union. My involvement in the management and day-to-day operations of our farm have given me insights into Union County agriculture and the relationship between coal and corn that are impossible to cite.

In any study of a community that involves agriculture or natural resources, staff members of the Cooperative Extension Service of the state land grant university serve as key point people for researchers. I sought advice on potential contacts and information

sources from the University of Kentucky's Union County Cooperative Extension Agent for Agriculture and Natural Resources. This individual happens to be my father, and in efforts not to rely too heavily on him as a resource, I have likely erred on the side of under-utilizing his knowledge and connections in the community. That said, I certainly obtained insights into Union County through dinner table conversations and a sort of family osmosis that would have been difficult to obtain otherwise. I have done my best to identify when I sought to use those insights in the dissertation and to seek out additional sources to support them.

I had guided farm visits and conversations with several Union County farmers; three of them happen to have the last name of Greenwell, a common one in the county, though they are not closely related and are all part of separate family farm operations. In this phase of the project, I have not conducted interviews directly with coal company personnel, miners, or administration. While the words of all would have been valuable contributions, there has been no shortage of documentation from and of the coal industry, and I am allowing published materials, official statements, archived oral histories, and my own observations be the source of primary views about Union County 's coal industry. Should this project proceed to monograph stage, I plan to conduct and incorporate coal oral histories.

Union County's two local newspapers, the *Union County Advocate* and *The Sturgis News*, have been particularly important sources for historical information. Especially between the 1940s and 1990s, the staff of these newspapers were not only

painstakingly attentive to the daily developments in the county and national and regional matters that affected the county's dominant economic activities (farming and mining), but were also active participants in the community. From my own lived observations, and casual conversations with current and former newspaper staffers and residents of the County, I understand that these papers have long been viewed as accurate and reliable sources of information about what happens in the county. Furthermore, the *Advocate* has a record of being an “advocate” for the people of the county, even at the expense of incurring the wrath of the U.S. government.<sup>25</sup> In some cases, such as in some aspects of the Camp Breckinridge land acquisition, original records were destroyed and those involved are no longer living and so the *Advocate's* reporting is a rare available source. The *Advocate* long has and still does publish weekly news articles by the Union County staff of the Cooperative Extensive Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service), and Farm Service Agency, which serve as, or take the place of, newsletters for these agencies. The *Advocate* is not yet digitized or indexed, and so close examination of every available issue was required.

Because of Union County's mineral wealth, it has been the subject of multiple detailed studies by the Kentucky Geological Survey since the 1850s. These studies have provided much essential documentation and supported information found in the *Advocate* and elsewhere. The Tennessee Valley Authority also conducted several studies of Western Coalfields resources, particularly focused on coal reserves they were considering and did ultimately acquire in Union County. These studies have also been important

<sup>25</sup> e.g. “The People Are Entitled To Know” (editorial), *Union County Advocate*, 19 February 1942.

sources.

While I have not located any scholarly analysis of Union County agriculture or mining, the work of several local memoirists and history buffs, a 1941 Kentucky Writers Project-Works Progress Administration book on the county, and a late-nineteenth-century local history and historical atlas have been extremely valuable. In 2009, Michael Guillerman published a detailed memoir of his personal experiences and observations from working as a coal miner in Union County for several years.<sup>26</sup> George Brown Simpson, a Sturgis lawyer, self-published a dozen manuscripts of his personal memoirs, histories of area churches, local biographies, and annotated cemetery records and other historical documents. His records of his personal memories provide important insight into daily activities during his time; however, there are some confusing, and possibly contradictory, accounts across his many publications, and some of the information he provides has discrepancies with other records and accounts. I have primarily used his historical narratives as guides for looking for other verifiable records of the same events elsewhere. I have used his personal recollections as memoirs are typically used, as individual, subjective accounts of events. Another local historian, Dennis Kirchner, assembled several collections of local documents into bound volumes, sometimes providing introductory timelines drawn from the documents. In almost all cases I used the original documents rather than his bound copies, but in a few rare instances when the original was not available I used Kirchner's copy. Peyton Heady, who worked as clerk at Camp Breckinridge and later for the postal service, compiled and authored over 25

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<sup>26</sup> Guillerman, *Face Boss*.

volumes related to Union County history, but most are related to genealogy and local cemeteries. His assembly of articles and artifacts and the timeline he constructed regarding Camp Breckinridge has been used by numerous Kentucky historians; while I referred to his timeline, I sought out the original newspaper articles rather than using his compilation.<sup>27</sup> Rarely does a dissertation have access to perfect source materials, but it has been a particular challenge to assemble a reasonably accurate narrative of the primary activities involved in over two centuries of Union County's changing landscape. I hope that this work will prove to be of interest not only to scholars, but also to local residents and others with ties to Union County.

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27 Heady's contributions to Union County history were noted in a "Tribute to Mr. Peyton Heady" given by Senator Mitch McConnell on 26 April 2005 in the U.S. Senate. Congressional Record 109<sup>th</sup> Congress (26 April 2005) S4252.



## Chapter 2: Foundations of the Hybrid Energy Landscape— Building Farms and Mines

In 1784, Peter Casey traveled down the Ohio River on a flatboat, as leader of a party of surveyors.<sup>1</sup> When Casey stepped off his boat at the mouth of Highland Creek, in what would become Union County, Kentucky, he was immediately impressed with the rich landscape he saw around him. Casey and his men had been charged by the State of Virginia with surveying land in what was then Virginia's Kentucky County for distribution as grants to reward soldiers who had been loyal and brave during the Revolutionary War. As Casey's group moved across the landscape, establishing survey lines and dividing it into grant parcels, they observed both the potential for high quality farmland and mineral resources throughout the area. When it came time to select the land he would receive as payment for their surveying work, Casey chose 15,000 acres, some in the area near Highland Creek where he had landed, as well as some near where the Tradewater River flowed into the Ohio. Included in this particular acreage were not only lands that could be cleared into productive farm fields, but also visible outcroppings of coal resembling what Casey had seen in the coal fields in the state of Virginia as it is now bounded.<sup>2</sup> Though Peter Casey himself ultimately did not do much to develop the land he

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1 Flatboats were the most common form of downstream transportation on the “western waters” of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth century. Leland Baldwin, *The Keelboat Age on Western Waters* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1941), 47-49.

2 *History of Union County, Kentucky: A complete account of the settlement, organization and government of the county, together with facts and figures concerning the society, professions, commerce, industries, agriculture, coal, railroads, education, religion, and other institutions and resources of the county, and biographical sketches of its leading citizens* (Evansville, IN: Courier Co., Printers, Binders and Engravers, 1886), 44. According to the *History*, Peter Casey told his son Samuel in 1827 that he had

claimed, in the hands of his progeny, his lands eventually became a strong base for the development of both mining and agriculture in the county.

It is notable that Casey recognized both the agricultural and mineral potential of Union County lands. Though some Euro-Americans had already passed through and spoken of this land, they generally did not recognize its widespread fertile soil and wealth-generating mineral resources, as such potential had also been unrecognized in some other contemporaneous explorations into the trans-Appalachian regions.<sup>3</sup> Though both took some years to develop after Peter Casey's initial surveys, the practices of coal mining and grain farming have been part of a constantly evolving landscape of energy production throughout Union County's history.

There is much to be read in this landscape, both in what composed it in the past and how it came to be in its contemporary state. While other ventures have left their marks, the agricultural and mining developments that began soon after Casey's survey have remained the dominant activities in the county's economy and remained the dominant markers on its landscape. Therefore, in order to understand the mid-twentieth through early twenty-first century energy landscape development that is the subject of the following chapters of this dissertation, it is essential to take a look at the long history of the landscapes of energy production in Union County as part of the ongoing development of the hybrid energy landscape.

While taking a long historical look at still-active agricultural landscapes has been

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selected his Tradewater lands because of their resemblance to coal fields in Virginia. See also: Dennis Kirchner, "Coal's history rich one in county," *Union County Advocate*, 25 September 1991.

3 *History of Union County*, 9.

adopted by many scholars, the multi-century approach to a still-active energy landscape has rarely been taken by those who study landscapes of mechanical fuel extraction, transportation, and production.<sup>4</sup> Several approaches have dominated the scholarship on these non-hybrid energy landscapes. The work of Martin Pasqualetti, who had a significant role in bring the term “energy landscape” into use among geographers, has tended to look at them as a contemporary issue at the time he is writing. In his studies of the development of solar, wind, and geothermal energy sources in varied locations, as well as in his work on the Alberta tar sands, he focuses on how these projects are currently altering or will alter the landscape. In his case studies of emerging or alternative energy sources, completely new energy infrastructure is introduced into landscapes where it had little or no presence before.<sup>5</sup> While this work is invaluable for understanding contemporary energy issues, we must take a more historical look to understand areas, like Union County, where the energy landscape has been developing for centuries in forms that are direct predecessors to those being developed today.

When scholars have taken an historical approach to contemporary landscapes still used for or firmly associated with energy production, they have often approached these

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4 Examples of long looks at active agricultural landscapes include Mark Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: the Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999). For examples of very long historical examinations of agricultural landscapes, see William Doolittle's body of work on farming in Sonora, Mexico, and Emilio Sereni, *History of the Italian Agricultural Landscape*, trans. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997 [originally published 1961]).

5 Martin Pasqualetti, “Land Requirements for the Solar and Coal Options,” *The Geographical Journal* 150 (1984): 192-212; Martin Pasqualetti, “Morality, Space, and the Power of Wind-Energy Landscapes,” *Geographical Review* 90 (2000): 381-394; Martin Pasqualetti, “Social Barriers to Renewable Energy Landscapes” *Geographical Review* 101 (2011): 201-223; Martin Pasqualetti, “The Alberta Oil Sands from Both Sides of the Border,” *The Geographical Review* 99 (2009): 248-267.

landscapes as problems that developed over several decades or centuries, and now need to be corrected or managed. Multiple studies of European landscapes have looked at areas where long-term mining and use of coal to fuel factories and produce electricity have resulted in severe environmental degradation and public health risks after the economic benefits of the activities have mostly disappeared. In their work on Tuzla in northeast Bosnia, Vanesa Castan Broto *et al.* termed the area, long dominated by a power plant and the disposal of its coal ash waste, a “pollution landscape,” because of the pervasive effects on the environment and human culture; the inhabitants have had to find ways to cope with and attempt to manage this pollution landscape.<sup>6</sup> Natalija Speh and Dusan Plut, in their study of the Salek Valley in Slovenia, examined the strategies that had been implemented over the past two decades to correct some of the land subsidence, water contamination, and air pollution caused by decades of mining, power production, and other industrial activities, transitioning the landscape into something new.<sup>7</sup> Such studies typically position the land and the communities inhabiting it as abandoned victims of industrial-scale energy production. Union County differs from these case studies, as agriculture has, throughout the last two centuries, continually managed to negotiate equal or near-equal footing with coal mining on the landscape, and mining is still actively a major part of the local economy.

Other historical approaches to energy landscapes have firmly positioned them in

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6 Vanesa Castán Broto, Paul Tabbush, Kate Burningham, Lucia Elghali & David Edwards, “Coal ash and risk: Four social interpretations of a pollution landscape,” *Landscape Research* 32 (2007): 481-497.

7 Natalija Speh & Dusan Plut, “Sustainable landscape management in Slovenia: Environmental improvements for the Velenje coal mining community 1991-2000,” *GeoJournal* 54 (2001): 569-578.

the past. Rather than being historical studies of active, contemporary landscapes, they are examining the landscapes as pieces of history. Richard Francaviglia's work on the landscapes of historic mining districts in the U.S., and, while not completely landscape-focused, Bonnie Christensen's examination of Red Lodge, Montana, are examples of such studies.<sup>8</sup> While Andrew Isenberg's work on the California gold rush and related mining activity strongly connects it to subsequent industrial and agricultural landscape change, the mining itself is still firmly situated in history.<sup>9</sup> In much of Peter Goin and Elizabeth Raymond's work on mining landscapes in the United States, including the anthracite mining landscape in northeastern Pennsylvania and a former uranium mining site in Texas, they position mining both as an activity that devastated the environment and had severe social consequences, and as an activity of the past.<sup>10</sup>

Christopher Jones, in his 2009 dissertation entitled *Energy Landscapes: Coal Canals, Oil Pipelines, Electricity Transmission Wires in the Mid-Atlantic, 1820-1930*, adopted an approach to the development of an energy landscape most similar to the one I am taking, as he looked at a century-long history of fossil fuel infrastructure without imposing a declensionist narrative. Jones placed transportation at the center of energy landscapes, defining them specifically as “systems of energy transport infrastructure in action in a regional and social context,” with “energy” referring to

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8 Richard Francaviglia, *Hard Places: Reading the Landscape of America's Historic Mining Districts* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1991); Bonnie Christensen, *Red Lodge and the Mythic West: Coal Miners to Cowboys* (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2002).

9 Andrew Isenberg, *Mining California: An Ecological History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005).

10 Peter Goin and Elizabeth Raymond, *Changing Mines in America* (Santa Fe: Center for American Places, 2004).

mechanical fuels in his analysis.<sup>11</sup> While Jones briefly gestured toward the post-1930s impact of the infrastructure he studied in his introduction and conclusion, he still firmly ended the substance of his research and analysis at 1930, and did not carry his analysis of infrastructure through to the contemporary dynamic landscape. Limiting the analysis of Union County's hybrid energy landscape to the distant past would both miss substantial aspects of its development and potential implications for other areas, which is why it is carried through the recent past and present in Chapters 4 through 6.

### ***Pre-1780s-1870s: Foundations of the hybrid energy landscape***

When Peter Casey and his surveying team arrived on the riverbanks of soon-to-be Union County, they did not stumble upon a land untouched by humans. The Euro-Americans who passed through the area had been hunting, and a very small number had even planted a few acres of corn during temporary residence in the area.<sup>12</sup> The land had also long been inhabited and used by Native Americans.

While nomadic peoples had been using the lower Ohio Valley for millennia, between 1000 BC and 1000 AD, groups, whom archaeologists refer to as “Woodland peoples,” began constructing relatively permanent villages and camps. While previous land users in the area had done some proto-garden experimentation by raising squash in trash heaps, the Woodland peoples grew squash, sunflower, and some small-seeded plants

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11 Christopher Jones, *Energy Landscapes: Coal Canals, Oil Pipelines, Electricity Transmission Wires in the Mid-Atlantic, 1820-1930*. Publicly accessible Penn Dissertations. Paper 16. 2009.  
<http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/16> .

12 *History of Union County*, 2,10.

in gardens, though the majority of their food supply still came from hunting, fishing, and gathering. Archaeologists group the village-dwelling farmers who followed the Woodland peoples from 1000-1700 AD under the term “Mississippians.” The Mississippians relied on the corn they produced on their farms for 60% of their diets. This dependence on corn and other crops meant that habitation and social organization were tied to agricultural practice and the land, and they lived in the same village all year. Groups of villagers worked together to clear land for planting and to keep the farm fields in good condition.<sup>13</sup>

The Carbon-Welborn people were the last of the Mississippians to inhabit the area, from around 1400-1700 AD, though they had abandoned their villages before Euro-Americans arrived. Extensive remains of a Carbon-Welborn village site were excavated on a farm near Uniontown in Union County in 1987, and while that excavation was begun illegally and unethically and was fraught with controversy, it did ultimately contribute to knowledge about their activities in the area. The patterns and concerns of Carbon-Welborn farmers bore some similarity to those of the Euro-Americans who later settled in Union County, as both were guided by the features of the land and the needs of their farming practices. Much like those who came after them, the Carbon-Welborn people and their ancestors chose this area for their settlements because of the supply of

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13 David Pollack, Cheryl Ann Munson, and A. Gwynn Henderson, *Slack Farm and the Carbon-Welborn People* (Lexington: Kentucky Archaeological Survey, 1996), 5-6; see also Paul Kreisa, “Mississippian Secondary Centers Along the Lower Ohio River Valley: An Overview of Some Sociopolitical Implications” in *Current Archaeological Research in Kentucky: Volume 3* (Frankfort: Kentucky Heritage Council, 1995), 161-177.

natural resources and the availability of river transportation.<sup>14</sup> In the fields they collaboratively cleared, Carbon-Welborn farmers grew a variety of corn now referred to as “Midwestern 12,” as it had 12 rows of kernels per cob. In addition to their most important crop of corn, domesticated beans also formed a significant part of the Carbon-Welborn diet, and they grew tobacco for social and ritual use.<sup>15</sup> Though the Carbon-Welborn people had left their settlements well before Casey's arrival, some groups of Shawnee Indians were likely still seasonally living and hunting on the northwestern Kentucky land, though, in the case of Union County, most of the land they cleared with fire to raise corn was across the Ohio River around what is now Shawneetown, Illinois.<sup>16</sup>

Disputed rights to ownership and use of land were part of the earliest days of Euro-American settlement in the area that would become Union County. After the Revolutionary War, Virginia set aside all lands in the county of Kentucky beyond (south and southwest of) the Green River for land grants to Revolutionary War veterans, based on their rank as officers and length of their military service.<sup>17</sup> This area of Kentucky became known as the “Military District.”<sup>18</sup> Though Peter Casey and his crew surveyed and reported the tracts to the Revolutionary War veterans who had earned them, many of

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14 Pollack, Munson, and Henderson, *Slack Farm*, 9

15 Pollack, Munson, and Henderson, *Slack Farm*, 21

16 Jerry Clark, *The Shawnee* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 2-3, 40-41. Clark makes the point that, though the Shawnee moved seasonally, descriptions of what permanent-seeming settlements they did have in Kentucky may be hard to find in the archival record. Speaking broadly of Euro-American movement into Kentucky after both the French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War, Clark notes that surveyors and land speculators may not have mentioned the presence of Indians in an attempt to make the land seemed more attractive to settlers.

17 Lowell Harrison and James Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997); George Huston, *Memories of Eighty Years* (Morganfield, KY: Sun Print, 1904). Harrison and Klotter say south of the Green, Huston says west of the Green; both are fair descriptions.

18 Huston, *Memories*, 69.



these owners did not take any immediate action on their Kentucky possessions and essentially forgot about them.<sup>19</sup> According to the reflections of Union County lawyer George Huston,

These lands were then universally regarded by the old soldiers, who thus secured them, as something that their grandchildren might, perhaps, use or sell to advantage at some distant time in the future, but they could see nothing in them to profit themselves. The country was then a wilderness, inhabited only by wild beasts, and often invaded by hostile savages—coming from both sides, from Indiana and Tennessee—although no tribe is known to have lived there. And it was this natural indifference upon the part of the soldiers, thus receiving what they held to be titles to almost worthless lands, that led to the long neglect of their rights, which caused such a tangle of titles in this Military District of Kentucky as never existed in any other country in the world.<sup>20</sup>

While Huston's characterization of Native Americans is reflective of dominant attitudes of his time and debatable, he was an expert on litigation over these land rights, as he handled much of the legal resolution of the title disputes in the Military District for Revolutionary War veterans.

Securing protection for these land rights had been a major part of Virginia's conditions for Kentucky's statehood. As part of the decade-long efforts to achieve statehood for Kentucky, “An Act concerning the erection of the District of Kentucky into an Independent State,” more commonly known as the Virginia Compact, was passed on 18 December 1789. The Compact established the terms that accompanied Kentucky's final separation from Virginia and statehood in 1792. Section 9 of the act stated that no land grants could be issued by Kentucky that conflicted with those issued by Virginia

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<sup>19</sup> *History of Union County*, 177.

<sup>20</sup> Huston, *Memories*, 70-71.

through 1 September 1791. Section 10 of the Compact specifically mentioned that lands which had been appropriated by Virginia to individuals for military or other services would remain as they had been granted, and that Virginia could continue to grant lands for military service through 1 May 1792.<sup>21</sup>

While these lands were banked investments for those who held grants to them, to the residents of western Kentucky they were part of the settlement and development of the area. Large tracts of uninhabited and unimproved lands were perceived as dangerous to those actively constructing homes and beginning cultivation on patches of nearby lands, largely as the uninhabited areas were seen as ideal habitat for wild animals and outlaws.<sup>22</sup> On 21 December 1795, the Kentucky General Assembly, acknowledging in the legislation that “a number of people have settled themselves on the vacant land south of Green river, under a belief that they were no longer liable to be taken by military warrants, and that the legislature would grant them settlements therefore, on paying a moderate price for the same,” approved “An ACT for the relief of the Settlers on the south side of Green River.” This act, which came to be known as a “headright law,”

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21 Harrison and Klotter, *A New History*, 55-61; Virginia General Assembly, “An Act concerning the erection of the District of Kentucky into an Independent State ” passed 18 December 1789, available at [www.sos.ky.gov/admin/land/.../Compact%20with%20Virginia.pdf](http://www.sos.ky.gov/admin/land/.../Compact%20with%20Virginia.pdf). Accessed 19 November 2013.

22 Western Kentucky has not been plagued by the extreme level of enduring stereotypes surrounding violence and outlaw activity as Appalachian Eastern Kentucky. Nevertheless, from the 1780s through the 1820s, the region, including Union County, was the sight of considerable criminal activity. Notoriously violent outlaws, the Harp Brothers, sometimes called “America's First Serial Killers,” were active in the area around 1800. Other criminals and “river pirates” were also drawn to the area because of its proximity to Cave-in-Rock, Illinois, a criminal hideout and meeting place on the Ohio River. See Otto Rothert, *The Outlaws of Cave-in-Rock: historical accounts of the famous highwaymen and river pirates who operated in pioneer days upon the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and over the old Natchez Trace* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1924). The 1886 *History of Union County* indicates that there were still sightings of large groups of bears off the most traveled roads in 1815-1816, and the last bear in the county was reportedly killed in 1857 (517). Wilcats and panthers were considered plentiful until 1825, and wolves until 1833 (771).

allowed settlers to obtain ownership of up to 200 acres of otherwise uninhabited and unimproved land in the Military District by proving that they resided on it and making improvements to it. Huston asserts that while the intention of the legislation may have been to support and encourage settlement of the area, it was severely abused, with some speculators obtaining grants by only making inconsequential improvements to the land, such as “chopping down a few pawpaw bushes and forming a brushpile, or, at the most, getting a log hut put up and a squatter to live in it.”<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, attempts to divest people of possession of their lands because outside interests perceived change or improvements to those lands to be necessary for progress or some greater good would prove to be recurring in subsequent centuries of Union County history.

Upon hearing news of the passage of the 1795 act and another in 1797 that provided for legal ownership to those residing on land for several years, with priority over all other claims, some Virginians holding the military warrants immediately started engaging Kentucky lawyers in defense of their granted land. Other heirs of original grant recipients did not attempt to claim the lands their ancestors had been promised for several decades. Around the 1840, many Virginians seeking to defend their land grants sent their documentation to and sought assistance from noted lawyer and politician Archibald Dixon of Henderson, with whom Huston worked closely. With Huston doing

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<sup>23</sup> William Littell, compiler, *The Statute Law of Kentucky: With Notes, Prælections, and Observations on the Public Acts. Comprehending Also, the Laws of Virginia and Acts of Parliament in Force in this Commonwealth; the Charter of Virginia, the Federal and State Constitutions, and So Much of the King of England's Proclamation in 1763, as Relates to the Titles to Land in Kentucky. Together with a Table of Reference to the Cases Adjudicated in the Court of Appeals* (Frankfort KY: William Hunter, 1809), 686-7; Huston, *Memories*, 137.

background work on the claims, and Dixon handling courtroom oration, they managed to return most of the land to the holders of the military grants. Dixon bolstered courtroom and public support for the military grant holders by speaking persuasively of the patriotic service their ancestors had given to the nation.<sup>24</sup>

The deed confusion and accompanying legal proceedings represented a battle over both the land itself, and realizations that two different government bodies, the Commonwealths of Virginia and Kentucky, had about what the land should be. For Virginia, it represented a payment for services rendered, and was a form of currency as much as it was a place on the earth. For Kentucky, this land, and the people who had taken residence upon it, represented settlement, economic development, and protection for the emerging towns and farms in the area. Regardless of the different interpretations of the land involved, the land grants as surveyed by Casey, and the results of the land grant conflicts as litigated by Huston and Dixon, helped to lay the spatial grid for the hybrid landscape of agriculture and mining that developed in Union County.

The Euro-American settlers who ultimately moved to the Union County area for the purposes of permanent residence were largely from Virginia and previously settled regions of Kentucky, including Jefferson and Oldham Counties.<sup>25</sup> They initially concentrated on typical pioneer alterations to the landscape to make it hospitable for agriculture and daily life. Two of the main activities were clearing cane from the river bottom areas and gradually removing brush and trees from the higher lands. As Thomas

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<sup>24</sup> Huston, *Memories*, 137-138, 141-142.

<sup>25</sup> *History of Union County*, 10.

Coleman noted in his 1940 *Slavery Times in Kentucky*, many settlers came to Kentucky in the 1780s in an attempt to pull themselves out of ruin stemming from the economic disruption caused by the Revolutionary War. Their slaves came west with them, but rarely numbered more than two or three per family. Coleman positions these slaves as an essential part of both the social fabric and the labor force of frontier homes. He notes that slaves did complete a good portion of the labor of cutting trees and clearing the land for agriculture, alongside their owners. Wealthy families seeking to move to Kentucky often sent slaves and overseers ahead to clear land, plant crops, and build homes, as they were 'unwilling to undergo the hardships and rigors of pioneer life.'<sup>26</sup>

In the first published attempt at a comprehensive history of Union County, which appeared in 1886, slavery was only mentioned a few times in passing, such as a line stating that when farmers owned slaves, the slaves worked to clear woodlands for cultivation and shucked corn, and a note that men who owned slaves were favored among those asked to assist in a house-raising, as they would bring their enslaved labor force as well as their own muscle. In describing much of the hard labor that occurred in the early days of Union County, this book is often ambiguous about who performed it, calling, for example, those who milled corn into meal “operators” or “workmen.”<sup>27</sup> That said, the 1886 *History of Union County* has perhaps its most extensive discussion of slavery in a paragraph explaining how large farmers found it more economical to have their land

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26 J. Winston Coleman, *Slavery Times in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 4-6. Though his language and assessments are now somewhat antiquated, and he makes generalizations about the whole of Kentucky with little information on the specifics of the northwestern portion, Coleman does provide some clues about the labor structures these settlers brought with them.

27 *History of Union County*, 31-32.

worked through a tenant system or rent it out, as they did not have to care for the basic needs and health of the slaves.<sup>28</sup> Both Coleman's 1940 work and the 1886 *History* are as indicative of prevailing white attitudes toward slavery in the time of their publication as they are of the actual history of slavery in Kentucky and in Union County. According to the U.S. Federal Census and Slave Schedules, in 1850, Union County had a population of 2,292 slaves and a population of 6,720 free persons. In 1860, Union County had a population of 3,105 slaves, and a free population of 9,686. Of Union County's 485 slave holders in 1860, over half of them (272) held 4 or fewer slaves.<sup>29</sup> Despite the relatively small slave populations on the farms of the majority of slave owners, the sheer number of slaves in the population indicates that labor provided by slaves likely had a far greater hand in shaping the Union County agricultural landscape than the 1886 *History of Union County* indicated.

By the time of his 1808 voyage down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, Fortescue Cuming reported substantial settlement along the banks that would become part of Union County when it separated from Henderson three years later. Below Wabash Island, Cuming "moored for the night just under the cabin and well improved farm of Peter Lash." Lash had lived there for four years, and let Cuming know that a "fine populous settlement of several families" existed just inland from his farm.<sup>30</sup> Even in these earliest

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<sup>28</sup> *History of Union County*, 96. Note: the 1850 census indicates that slaves were in fact present in Union County by that time, though a family generally owned no more than four slaves.

<sup>29</sup> Historical Federal Census and Slave Schedule Data accessed through the University of Virginia Library Historical Census Browser at <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>.

<sup>30</sup> Fortescue Cuming, *Sketches of a tour to the western country through the states of Ohio and Kentucky : a voyage down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and a trip through the Mississippi Territory and part of West Florida : commenced at Philadelphia in the winter of 1807 and concluded in 1809* (Pittsburgh [Pa.] : Cramer, Spear & Eichbaum, 1810), 244-245.

decades of the area's Euro-American settlement, Union County farmers and their slaves installed primitive drainage systems, including ditches and later tiles, to enable cropping of the fertile swamp lands.<sup>31</sup> By the 1850s, damp low lands along many of the county's creeks, including Lost Creek and Pond Creek, had been fully reclaimed so that they could be cropped, to such an extent that their cultivation provided “ample reward” for the work involved in draining them. In addition to producing “abundant crops” of corn, the reclaimed lands of Union County quickly proved profitable for the cultivation of wheat, oats, rye, barley, clover, tobacco, and potatoes.<sup>32</sup> By the 1880s, drainage work had become very sophisticated, with farmers employing surface drains, slab-covered drains, and drain tiles; the last of these methods was in enough demand for the county to support three drain tile manufacturers.<sup>33</sup>

Early population growth in Union County was based almost entirely on agriculture, and the business and industrial development on the landscape consisted of general stores, blacksmiths, milling facilities and other support services for farming. Similarly, the earliest roads were in service of the farms, as they evolved from trails that connected the ever-expanding forest clearings of early farms to each other and to churches and the tiny clusters of agribusinesses that were emerging throughout the county and especially at river landings.<sup>34</sup> As these roads improved, it was said that there was no

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<sup>31</sup> *History of Union County*, 95-97.

<sup>32</sup> Sydney S. Lyon, *Topographical Geological Report of that Portion of Kentucky including Union and part of Crittenden Counties, Surveyed During the Years 1854 and 1855* in David Dale Owen, *Report of the Geological Survey in Kentucky*, made during the years 1854 and 1855 (Frankfort KY: A.G. Hodges, State Printer, 1856), 392.

<sup>33</sup> *History of Union County*, 97.

<sup>34</sup> Kentucky Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration. *American Guide Series: Union County Past and Present* (Louisville: Schuhmann Printing Co., 1941), 57-59.

point in Union County that was farther than a day's wagon round trip to the Ohio River.<sup>35</sup> Marketing of agricultural products and, as mining soon developed, coal, outside of the county and immediately surround areas was largely dependent on this river for much of the nineteenth century.

In 1811, the first steamboat traveled from Pittsburgh down the Ohio River, and then on down the Mississippi to New Orleans. This began an era of intensive steamboating on what were then "western" waters. As Adam Kane has noted, the steamboat was the first technology suited to rapid and affordable movement of loads in and out of the Ohio and Mississippi River Valleys, and hence facilitated extensive exploitation of the Valleys' natural resources for distant markets.<sup>36</sup> Wood was the only fuel used in significant quantities for steamboats for the first two decades of their traversing Ohio River waters, as it burned quickly, cleanly, and very hot. Growing steamboat traffic quickly denuded the river-bordering landscape of accessible and quality wood, which caused timber prices to rise and steamboat operators to look for cheaper fuel sources. Coal had not been popular for use by steamboats, as they could only carry an average of 150 bushels, which only supplied just over a day's fuel needs for many of the boats, and there few places to restock as the boats moved to the lower Ohio. It would be the opening of coal reserves in places such as Union County that enabled the steamboats to use coal as fuel consistently. While by 1860, coal was widely depended upon as steamboat fuel, very few boats ever used it exclusively for their entire trips, primarily due

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<sup>35</sup> *History of Union County*, 429.

<sup>36</sup> Adam Kane. *The Western River Steamboat* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 13.



to its low availability on the lower Mississippi. A common practice was burning a half-and-half mix of wood and coal, which some argued produced the hottest possible flame in the furnace.<sup>37</sup>

Expanding steamboat traffic in the second quarter of the nineteenth century drove the construction of steamboat landings for fuel and supply reloading, and towns surrounding them. Though other landings existed in Union County, what became the most prosperous one for most of the nineteenth century was on Peter Casey's personal claim. In 1826 or 1827, Peter's son Nicholas moved his family to his father's claim at the Tradewater's mouth, and worked to make the wilderness inhabitable there. He built a dock for steamboats, then called "Casey's Landing," and founded a settlement along the Ohio around the dock site that included the first ice house dug between Louisville and New Orleans. Steamboats would often dock for a whole day at Casey's Landing, so that freshly slaughtered meat and other farm products could be brought in from the interior lands of the county. In the late 1830s, the settlement was incorporated as the town of Caseyville, after Nicholas had been elected to the Legislature.<sup>38</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century, the supply of Union County coal available resulted in Caseyville becoming a popular stopping point for refueling of steamships, to meet the need for coal locally supplied to ports along the Ohio west of Pittsburgh.<sup>39</sup> The lure of

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<sup>37</sup> Despite wood's subsequent decades of dominance, coal had actually been the fuel used to power the *New Orleans*, the first boat to make the journey down the Ohio in 1811. See Louis Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), 267-270.

<sup>38</sup> *History of Union County*, 47, 567.

<sup>39</sup> B.N. Griffing, *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Henderson and Union Counties, Kentucky* (Philadelphia: D.J. Lake & Co., 1880).

coal at Caseyville and other Western Kentucky river markets also stimulated agricultural trade, as the refueling steamships provided market and shipping opportunities for local produce. Caseyville thus became an urban settlement whose growth was stimulated by both coal and farm products; classes of merchants trading in both emerged and achieved prosperity in business, displaying this prosperity in fine homes and an organized town.<sup>40</sup> By the 1870s, Caseyville had a population of 500, with three general stores, two drug stores, one hotel, one grocery, three lawyers, two physicians, and three churches serving the general public, in addition to those businesses geared toward farming and mining operations, including two grain dealers, one farm implement dealer, two blacksmith shops, one copper shop, and assorted businesses serving the needs of horses and wagons used both in these industries and in everyday life.<sup>41</sup> Though Caseyville's years as a thriving urban river port would ultimately come to an end, through much of the nineteenth century it served a key role in meeting the transportation needs of Union County's intertwined coal and corn economies and contributed to their growth.

There had been some small-scale coal mining activity in the Caseyville area in the early decades of the nineteenth century, but the products were only sold locally, meeting the needs of the settlers developing their new farms, homes, and businesses. Early miners determined the easiest yielding coal deposits to be around the Caseyville-adjacent area which would become the community of Dekoven.

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40 Griffing, *An Illustrated Historical Atlas*. Some evidence of Caseyville's mid-nineteenth century prosperity may be seen by examining the merchant's log book which George B. Simpson reformatted and annotated as *Caseyville River Merchant Trade & Sale records of 1854 & 1855 and the Tradewater Valley Farmers, Planters, and Miners* (Sturgis, KY: G.B. Simpson, 1988).

41 Griffing, *An Illustrated Historical Atlas*, 21.

Four commercial mines opened and closed in the 1840s. The first mine was opened in 1843, but did not last out the year; its closure was attributed to unprofitability. In 1847, a three foot vein of coal was opened by James H. Mulford near the sandstone formation called Anvil Rock, which was the object of much testing but little work to extract coal. Two other mines opened in the Dekoven area in 1848. The three Dekoven mines all closed in 1849 due to a cholera epidemic in which most area miners perished. While they lasted, the products of these mines, all dug from underground tunnels, were initially conveyed by wagon to either the Tradewater or the Ohio Rivers, and primarily sold at the growing port of Caseyville.<sup>42</sup> In the mid-1800s, most of the miners in Union County were still also involved in farming; there was not really a separate class of laborers in the county.<sup>43</sup> These miner-farmers operated small farms near the mines, and carried the lumber cut in the land clearing process to Caseyville, to be used in the construction of coal barges.<sup>44</sup> Many in the county were thus interested in the growth and prosperity of both the agricultural and coal trades. Despite their short lives, these early DeKoven mines still served as catalysts for the more permanent mine development in the area, as DeKoven would continue to be an area of mining activity in the county for centuries.

Larger and more enduring mine development in the Dekoven area began with President John Tyler, who obtained Union County land in the 1840s through the

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<sup>42</sup> *History of Union County*, 113-114; Kentucky Writers' Project, *Union County*, 172-173.

<sup>43</sup> While slave labor was used on many of the farming operations in the county, I have yet to find mention of slaves working in the mines, though it is hard to imagine that they were exempt from the back-breaking labor of digging for coal when it occurred on the land of their owners and as part of their owners' business enterprise.

<sup>44</sup> Daniel Bigham, *Towns and Villages of the Lower Ohio* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997).

settlement of a debt owed to him. Once he had determined that his land held valuable coal resources, he secured investors for developing mines and granted rights to build a railroad across his land for coal transportation, though it was not built. Within a decade, Tyler sold his interest in the land and its mining operations to a group of investors who would form the Kentucky Coal Company. The company began mining in 1853, calling the mine the “Curlew Mine” and transporting their coal to the river via a tram road, or a raised, edged track along which horses pulled the load. During the Civil War, the Curlew Mine supplied fuel to Union gunboats protecting the Ohio River shipping channels, and in 1865 Confederate guerrillas destroyed it, at that point as much out of revenge as strategy.<sup>45</sup> The Shotwell Mines opened in the Dekoven area just before the Civil War, in 1859. This mining complex had two openings, named “Shotwell” and “Morehead,” after shareholders in the enterprise.<sup>46</sup> Though the Shotwell coal was of high quality, the mine faltered for several years due to financial issues.<sup>47</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century, around the time Caseyville became known as a good source for coal among the steamboat operators traveling up and down the Ohio, Union County's mineral resources were also gaining notoriety among scientists and government officials. On 26 April 1854, Governor Lazarus Powell appointed David Dale Owens the Principal Geologist of Kentucky. After obtaining equipment and hiring necessary assistants, Owens began a preliminary reconnaissance of the Commonwealth from June through November of that year. Through the reconnaissance, in which he had

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45 Kentucky Writers' Project, 69-70; *History of Union County*, 113-114; See also Kirchner.

46 *History of Union County*, 114-118.

47 Kentucky Writers' Project, *Union County*, 173.

been instructed to begin his surveying with the “mineral regions,” Owens determined that Union County was the top priority for a thorough geological survey, including chemical analysis, and glowing reports of its extraordinary geology, mineral wealth, and rich agricultural soils were soon published and presented to state and national government bodies.<sup>48</sup> Owens placed Union County at the center of Kentucky's potential for economic prosperity through the sale of coal, not only to fuel ironworks, steamships, and the nation's growing rail system, but also in the production of emerging products including lubricating oils and paraffins.<sup>49</sup> Owens also found that even prior to the survey and the resulting publications, Union County's geological structure and mining activity up to that point had provided a significant amount of the vocabulary for Western Coalfields geology. For example, the massive sandstone formation separating the Lower (deeper) and Upper (closer to the surface) Coal measures had been named “Anvil Rock” throughout the Western Coalfield. The name came from two masses in an uplift of this sandstone visible near Dekoven in Union County, whose shapes resembled anvils.<sup>50</sup> Much of the detailed topographical survey field work on Union County was carried out by teams lead by Sidney Lyon, in December 1854 and January 1855, and then again in April through June of 1855. Lyon's report frequently mentions the abundant coal resources and rich agricultural soils in the same sentence. He noted that “the soil is of a

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48 David Dale Owen, Geological Survey. “Synopsis of some of the most important results of the Geological Survey of Kentucky up to the present time, and the advantages that may be anticipated from its further prosecution” Kentucky Historical Society Special Collections (Frankfort: Kentucky Geological Survey, 185u –presumably 1855); David Dale Owen, *Report of the Geological Survey in Kentucky, Made During the Years 1854 and 1855* (Frankfort: A.G. Hodges, 1856), 5-52.

49 Owen, *Report*, 9-12.

50 Owen, *Report*, 45, Plates 3 & 4.

superior quality, not difficult of cultivation, yielding abundant crops of corn, wheat, oats, rye, barley, clover, tobacco, potatoes.” Lyon observed that coal measures had been observed and were being explored around the county, and while the most active work in developing them was being done in the Caseyville-Dekoven area, they grew thicker farther east of the Ohio River toward Highland Creek.<sup>51</sup> This would be the area most aggressively mined in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The first century of sustained Euro-American presence in Union County brought the initial development of the hybrid energy landscape of coal and corn production. Though coal resources were noticed early on, the commercial exploitation of these resources was not seriously attempted until steamboats became a regular presence on the Ohio River, and there was a need for refueling stations on the Ohio that Union County's natural resources and riverfront location could fill. Similarly, the market opportunities facilitated by steamboat landings encouraged Union County farmers to produce quantities beyond what they needed for personal use and local trade. Steamboats, a part of larger system of national and international commerce, thus helped stimulate the shift of both farming and mining from essentially subsistence to commercial activities. The populations and efforts that created the landscapes of farming and mining through the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century were either overlapping or symbiotic, and the landscapes of production of each were already often the same. Though the lands

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51 Sidney Lyon, “Topographical Geological Report of that Portion of Kentucky including Union and Part of Crittenden Counties, Surveyed During the Years 1854 and 1855” in David Dale Owen, *Report of the Geological Survey in Kentucky, Made During the Years 1854 and 1855* (Frankfort: A.G. Hodges, 1856), 381-400.

immediately surrounding both mines and farms remained sparsely populated and required construction of roads to connect to markets and supplies, both mining and farming stimulated the growth of small urban settlements like Caseyville. The processes of mine and farm development thus not only collaboratively constructed the Union County landscape, but also spurred shifts in the distribution of the population across this land. Meanwhile, investigation of Union County's mineral resources through the Kentucky Geological Survey contributed to the growth of the area's coal industry, as it provided scientific validation that was then distributed by the Commonwealth's government.

### **1870s-1930s: A growing energy landscape**

The late nineteenth century was a period of rapid growth in the United States coal industry. As late as 1870, three-quarters of the total fuel supply in the United States was wood, but by the mid-1880s, one-half of the total energy came from coal. Coal consumption had doubled each decade from 1850 to 1890, and by the first decade of the twentieth century, coal provided three-quarters of the nation's energy. The magnitude of the American coal reserves compared to what existed in Europe had manifested by 1890, when the U.S. overcame Britain as the international leader in coal production.<sup>52</sup>

In keeping with the growth of coal as a national industry, outside investment began to substantially guide the development of the Union County coal industry after the Civil War. In 1872, the South Kentucky Coal Company gained a charter from the

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<sup>52</sup> Sam Schurr, *Energy in the American Economy, 1850-1975: an economic study of its history and prospects* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1960), 34-38; Barbara Freese, *Coal: A Human History*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 137.

Kentucky Legislature to begin operations in Union County.<sup>53</sup> In 1874, Dr. Percival Kelsey moved to Union County and became its vice-president and general manager.<sup>54</sup> One of Kelsey's first actions for the company was to purchase Dekoven's Shotwell Mines that had opened in 1859 and bring them back into operation. Kelsey wanted to develop the mines his company acquired to their full potential, and he implemented the most advanced and efficient mining technology of the time to do so. There was a 40-foot stratum of rock between the two coal seams that were accessed by the separate Shotwell and Morehead openings. The sandstone barrier between the mines was first pierced in the mid 1870s, and by the mid-1880s, Kelsey had overseen the construction of a 376 foot underground tunnel through the rock, connecting the two coal seams and allowing their combined bounty to be hauled out of Morehead, though the complex became known as simply the Shotwell Mine. The coal veins at Shotwell surfaced at the foot of a bluff and were situated at roughly an 8% slant, which facilitated easier removal of the coal than veins which had to be reached by a perpendicular shaft. Shaft mines could typically only elevate one car of coal to the surface at a time, whereas the stationary engine outside the Shotwell Mines could haul up to eight ten-to-fifteen bushel cars of coal at a time up the tunnel which had roughly the same slope as the vein.<sup>55</sup>

As is the case in many mining operations, the accumulation of water in the

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53 Kentucky Writers' Project, *Union County*, 173.

54 Kelsey received his medical degree from Lind University in Chicago in 1864. He practiced medicine in Lind County, Indiana, from the end of the Civil War until 1869, when he moved to Louisville, KY, and took up wagon manufacturing and the insurance business. *History of Union County*, 138.

55 *History of Union County*, 114-117. Kelsey was listed as an important provider of information for the text.



Shotwell Mine required constant attention. As part of the mine's design, a reservoir or “sump” sat at lowest point in the mine and collected the water. Prior to the early 1880s, water had to be hauled from the sump out of the mine by water cars. In 1882, Kelsey introduced a pump system to remove the water, which included a 60 horse power engine and on average could remove 24 hours of water accumulation in 12 hours of pumping. The 1880s-description of the pump system notes that “the pump could not be made of any ordinary material, for the water is of a nature to eat up anything but brass in a few months,” and goes on to state that the pump “has been tireless, ejecting the brackish, alum-like water in a stream three inches in diameter.” No mention was made of just where this caustic trajectory of water was pointed.<sup>56</sup>

The reinvigorated Shotwell Mine quickly developed a reputation for both quality and high productivity, which led to the coal being in demand throughout the American South within a decade of the mine's redevelopment. By the mid-1880s, Shotwell Coal was fueling the steam engines that were driving the growing post-Reconstruction Southern processing industries of iron, textiles, lumber, sugar, and tobacco. From Union County, Shotwell coal traveled down the Ohio to the Mississippi River to Memphis, from where it was distributed to places like Louisiana's Sugar Coast, Helena, Arkansas, and Vicksburg, Mississippi, which aspired to become industrial centers in the new Southern

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<sup>56</sup> *History of Union County*, 119. While this seems to indicate a lack of concern for water-based pollution, it is worth noting that urban American society was well-aware of these issues by the second half of the nineteenth century. See, for example, Joel Tarr, *The Search for the Ultimate Sink: Urban Pollution in Historical Perspective* (Akron: University of Akron Press, 1996) and Martin Melosi, *Pollution and Reform in American Cities, 1870-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980). Such concern may not have yet reached rural areas in the trans-Appalachian U.S..

economy.<sup>57</sup>

An important part of the Shotwell Coal's success was improvement in the transportation system for moving the coal from the mine to the Ohio River. Through the 1870s, mules hauled coal from the mine tipple to the river. In 1881, Kelsey installed a miniature railroad from the mines to a tipple at the river, a distance of 1½ miles. The railroad traversed flood-prone bottom land for ½ mile of its length, and was raised on an eight foot bed in that area. The railroad's sole purpose was to facilitate the running of 10-14 cars full of coal to a point that extended over the river barges, where their floor doors were opened and the coal was dumped, and then send them back empty to the mines. Because the locomotive had been constructed in Pittsburgh, it was sized to the narrow gauge of the north rather than the wider gauge common in the south.<sup>58</sup> Though railroads had been considered for coal transportation in Union County since the 1840s, Kelsey's little railroad was the first implemented, and represented a major leap in the development of the coal transportation infrastructure that would eventually spiderweb much of the county. The little railroad improved movement of the coal out of the mines, but what coal was shipped out of the county was still transported on barges on the Ohio River.<sup>59</sup>

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57 Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 21-22, 104-112; *History of Union County* 114, 118. The *History* also lists "Tureen" and "White River" as destinations for the Shotwell Coal, without listing their states. I speculate that Tureen was a misspelling of Turin, Georgia, which had some late 19<sup>th</sup> c. textile mill activity, and White River could refer to areas along that body of water in Arkansas.

James Cobb has noted that this Southern "industrial development" in the late nineteenth century had little potential for actually boosting the region's economy to the level of other areas of the U.S., as it was still primarily based on extraction, processing operations, and exploitation of cheap labor. See Cobb, *Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877-1984* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 17.

58 *History of Union County*, 117.

59 Note on the terms "miniature" and "little" railroad: the locomotive that Kelsey brought to Union

Much of the more widespread railroad development in Union County that was soon to come was spurred by the forced idleness of the coal mines due to the lack of available river transportation through the icy periods of the winter and the low periods in dry summer.

The 1880s were a time of great expansion in American railroads.<sup>60</sup> The U.S. added more mileage to its rail network between 1880 and 1890 than in any other decade in the nation's history. The rail expansion was especially aggressive in the south. Between 1877 and 1900, the South constructed railroads at a faster pace than the entire U.S., and the May 1886 movement of over 12,000 miles of wider southern track to standardize it with the narrower northern gauge indicates how integrated the national rail network had become by that time. Kentucky was average among southern states in its pace of growth, as it nearly doubled its total railroad track mileage in the 1880s.<sup>61</sup> In 1881, Dr. Kelsey reinvigorated previous failed efforts to connect Union County to the national rail network, as he had become tired of the weather and the river ruling over the workability of his mines.<sup>62</sup> He formed a mining and railroad company with the objective

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County only weighed six tons and had a ten-inch diameter cylinder, which very small by the standards of the time. Kelsey also named the locomotive the "Arthur Kelsey," after his son who was then still a very little boy. *History of Union County*, 117.

60 For more on general American railroad development in the late nineteenth century, see Roger Grant, *Railroads and the American People* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); Stewart Holbrook, *The Story of American Railroads* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1947); John Stover, *The Life and Decline of the American Railroad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); William Thomas, *The Iron Way: Railroads, the Civil War, and the Making of Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Richard White, *Railroaded: the Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).

61 John Stover, *The Railroads of the South 1865-1900: A Study in Finance and Control* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), 189-195; Ayers, 9-13. Note that Ayers (3) identifies that the post-Reconstruction borders of what was considered "The South" did not align exactly with what states had joined the Confederacy, and Kentucky was then considered firmly part of the South.

62 *History of Union County*, 432. Bigham in *Towns and Villages* (124, 142-3) notes that rural

of petitioning for, gaining investment for, and eventually building a full railroad that would connect his mines to other points in Union County and to the rail centers of Henderson, KY, over 30 miles away, and Evansville, IN, around 40 miles away, which would then connect to further major markets for the coal. As his investment partner in the company, he had Samuel Brown, the “Coal King” out of Pittsburgh, who had by that time amassed enormous wealth developing Appalachian coal resources.<sup>63</sup> Construction on this Ohio Valley Railroad out of Henderson began in October 1885, and it had reached the Dekoven area by July 1886, with numerous stops in Union County communities along the way.<sup>64</sup> By October 1886, the railroad had passed through an area that was not yet a town, but soon would become one, and would signal the beginning of significant changes in Union County's landscape of coal and agricultural production.

The area that would soon become Sturgis in southern Union County was, in the fall of 1886, “a pastoral scene” with “improved farms” along the Tradewater River.<sup>65</sup> Two mines had been opened in this area earlier in the 1880s, and their coal was shipped down the Tradewater to Caseyville for sale to steamboats. In 1886, Samuel Sturgis, acting on behalf of an affiliate of the the Ohio Valley Railroad Company, became

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northwestern Kentuckians were generally not eager to subscribe funds to the construction of rail lines. This was in part due to previous instances in which they had put up funds in advance for railroad projects and had neither the road materialize nor their funds return. At least one of the earlier failed railroad projects was in part attributable to the national economic downturn of 1873. Given the documented resistance to give up farm land for the railroad in Sturgis (see next paragraph), it is also reasonable to infer that farmers were reluctant to lose productive, cleared fields to railroad easements.

63 Dennis Kirchner, *A Centennial History of Sturgis, Kentucky: 1890-1990* (Sturgis: D. Kirchner, 1989). Stover in *The Railroads of the South* demonstrates that it was common for Northern financial interests to be heavily involved in Southern railroads. By 1890, Northerners controlled boards of directors and were presidents of just over half of the major railroads in the south (207-209).

64 Kentucky Writer's Project, *Union County*, 176

65 Kentucky Writers' Project, *Union County*, 128-129.

interested in land along the rail route, but the farmers who owned the land did not want to sell. In what seems to have been the first of many documented conflicts between farmers and the mining industry in Union County, the railroad company eventually persuaded some farmers to sell 600 acres of land adjacent to the railroad. They were reluctant to give up not only the land itself, but also their advantage of location in proximity to Caseyville and the wider markets for their crops to which it connected the farmers. The town of Sturgis was laid out and built as a company town, to house those who would work in and manage the proximate mines, and as a rail center for coal to be brought in on short lines from mines slightly farther away before being shipped off on the main line.<sup>66</sup> Those who farmed land along the connecting rail route to Sturgis continued to suffer some effects of the railroad beyond the loss of their land. Farmer Charles Henry Omer, in his journals, notes multiple instances of livestock—including in May 1904 alone, a sow, two pigs, and a calf—being hit and killed by trains. The railroad did compensate him for his losses.<sup>67</sup>

The North American Company, a utility holding company, organized and incorporated in New Jersey the West Kentucky Coal Company as a subsidiary in early 1905. The WKCC quickly acquired the holdings of the Sturgis-centered coal companies, and subsequently purchased additional coal mining properties in Union and Webster Counties. As local Sturgis historian Dennis Kirchner noted, the WKCC became “the single most important force affecting the lives of Sturgis citizens for almost fifty years,”

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66 Kentucky Writers' Project, *Union County*, 129; Kirchner, *A Centennial History*, 1-3.

67 Charles Henry Omer, 17 May 1904 and 21 May 1904, personal journal entries, box 1, folder 3, MSS 436, Western Kentucky University Special Collections Library Manuscript & Folklife Archives.

as thousands of Sturgis citizens during that time not only worked for the company, but also lived in company housing and were dependent on company stores.<sup>68</sup> The company took over buildings in downtown Sturgis, and in 1916 installed the first modern water system in the town as part of supplying water to its mines. At one point, the WKCC built up a new settlement called “Gardiner” around one of its mines near Grangertown, which rivaled Sturgis in its population and level of activity though it was never incorporated as a town and few of its structures remain into the twenty-first century.<sup>69</sup>

The WKCC built a new tipple on the Ohio River, about one mile south of Caseyville. Construction took from September 1907 to late 1909 and cost \$200,000. Also in 1909, the company began building a fleet of river barges for coal transportation, on which it spent over \$1,000,000.<sup>70</sup> By 1935, the WKCC had constructed eight new miles of railroad, composed of steel rails on creosote ties, on which three large engines and 117 fifty-ton railroad cars hauled coal from the mines to the tipple.<sup>71</sup>

Sturgis, which remained firmly as a company town from its inception in 1890 through the mid-twentieth century, helped serve as a catalyst for the distancing of the culture of farming from the culture of mining in Union County. Most of the miners who lived and worked there were not also farmers as their predecessors in the Dekoven mines had been, and the acquisition of land for the town had initially been an affront to the farming community. Though farmers did not want to give up their land for a new coal

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68 Kirchner, *A Centennial History*, 80.

69 Kentucky Writers' Project, *Union County*, 127-133; Kirchner, *A Centennial History*, 80-81.

70 Kirchner, *A Centennial History*, 80-81.

71 Kirchner, *A Centennial History*, 88.

town, and were aggrieved when their pigs were killed on the tracks, the associated coming of the railroad not only expanded the coal industry, but also helped in the expansion of the market for Union County agricultural products. Commentators looking back on the railroad in 1940 stated that, “The stimulating effect upon agriculture was direct and immediate,” even though the railroad had been intended primarily for moving coal.<sup>72</sup> Additional land was cleared in a combination of producing lumber for market and opening up new fields for farming; this transition from timber land to farm land had been mostly completed by the first decades of the 1900s.<sup>73</sup>

By 1910, Union County had the least amount of unimproved land of any county in the Western Coalfields region, at 13.8% of the county's total surface land area. Webster and Daviess Counties had the next least amounts of unimproved land, at 25% and 25.6% respectively. The Kentucky Geological Survey considered “unimproved land” to include commercial woodlands; swampy or ill-drained land near rivers and creeks; areas where standing forests at time of settlement had been cut and were covered by second growth timber and underbrush; lands that were heavily gullied or eroded after cropping or lumbering; and steep or rocky areas unsuitable for cultivation. Throughout the Western Coalfields, the amount of unimproved land increased between 1910 and 1920, from 38.6% to 41.1%. Though Union County still had the least amount of unimproved land in 1920, the amount had increased to 20.7%. For coal counties, such as Union, the

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<sup>72</sup> Kentucky Writers' Project, *Union County*, 75.

<sup>73</sup> Kentucky Writers' Project, *Union County*, 75. For more on the relationship between hinterlands and cities, and the importance of railroads for moving goods between them, see William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

Kentucky Geological Survey attributed some of this increase to deforestation on steep slopes, much of it performed by coal companies to gain timber for the mines. Soil erosion due to cultivation on steep slopes without planting protective cover crops was also blamed across the region, through it is unclear to what extent this was an issue in Union County. In Union County, the percent of land specifically in farms that remained unimproved decreased slightly from 11% to 10.1% from 1910 to 1920.<sup>74</sup>

Many of the improvements made to the land took the form of drainage work. While attempts to drain swampy lands and redirect water to facilitate the farming of fertile soil began very early in Union County agricultural history, these efforts had only intensified as time passed. By the 1920s, drainage projects for large areas of land in Kentucky were well-organized and overseen by county drainage commissioners. Two-thirds of the area in the state of Kentucky that had been part of extensive farmland drainage projects was in the Western Coalfields Region in Henderson, Daviess, and adjoining counties, of which Union was one.<sup>75</sup>

Even a century ago, drainage projects involved extensive changes to the landscape. Some of these projects involved straightening of large creeks. For some of the creeks straightened in the early 1900s, like Highland Creek on the Henderson-Union County border, the work was conducted by the Army Corps of Engineers, so that water would more quickly flow away from roads and fields than it had when traversing the

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74 Wilbur Greeley Burroughs, *The Geography of the Western Kentucky Coal Field: A Study of the Influence of Geology and Physiography upon the Industry, Commerce and Life of the people* (Frankfort: The Kentucky Geological Survey, 1924) 51-53, 174-177.

75 Burroughs, *The Geography of the Western Kentucky Coal Field*, 56.



natural, meandering watercourses. Steam-powered shovels were carried on small boats up the creeks, fueled by the trees and brush that had to be cleared for the earth under them to be moved. Somewhat less dramatically, many streams were deepened—in Union County the average was to 14 feet—and straightened, to increase their capacity for holding and moving water. Additional “tributary” ditches, around 4-7 feet in depth, were dug to carry water to main streams. Tiles were installed in fields needing additional drainage, and smaller tributary ditches were dug to connect to the larger drainage waterways.<sup>76</sup>

The agricultural economy of this time begged for these alterations to the landscape to open up and decrease the flood vulnerability of farm land. In addition to the railroad-related increases in demand, during these turn-of-the-century years, Union County crops tended to command higher prices than crops from other counties in the region. While tobacco was a dominant crop in the region, Union was far from being one of the top producing counties. Despite a relatively low production of the cash-yielding crop, Union led the region in average gross crop returns per farm at this time at \$2,756, while the regional average was \$1,513 and Kentucky's was \$1,288. This was mostly because Union County led the Western Coalfields region—and far exceeded both the region and the state average—in bushels of corn and wheat produced. In 1919, for example, Union County produced 5,531 bushels of corn per square mile of improved

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<sup>76</sup> Burroughs, *The Geography of the Western Kentucky Coal Field*, 57. In my next project, tentatively titled, “Drained: Waterway Restructuring in the Name of Agriculture in the Upper South,” I will provide a more thorough examination of the technologies which allowed for sophisticated drainage and water management in agricultural fields at the level of creek watersheds.

land, which was well above yields for both the Western Coal Field Region (at 3,635.3 bu/sq. mile) and Kentucky (at 3,275.0 bu/sq. mile). Similarly, Union County excelled in wheat production, yielding 1011 bushels per square mile of improved land, while the Western Coal Field Region as a whole produced at 514 bu/sq. mile and Kentucky produced at 475 bu/sq. mile.<sup>77</sup> The demonstrated high level of productivity of Union County's acreage in turn encouraged more drainage work and other landscape manipulations to open up and decrease the flood vulnerability of farmland, further engineering the food production landscape.

In addition to producing outstanding crop yields, Union County farmers were also developing a thriving livestock industry. The county's farmers were so attentive to the quality of their cattle that in 1922, a committee of seven local livestock producers, assisted by agricultural extension agents, joined the growing nationwide "Better Sires" campaign, by developing and implementing a plan to have all of the county's bulls be purebred. Union County received national recognition in 1926 when this campaign succeeded, and the county became the first in the United States to fully eradicate "scrub" bulls.<sup>78</sup>

Union County's agricultural productivity was reflected in its land values. In 1920, Union County had the second-highest average land value per acre in the Western Coalfields region, at \$85.35. It was exceeded only by Daviess County, at \$92.21, which

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<sup>77</sup> Burroughs, *The Geography of the Western Kentucky Coal Field*, 181-185.

<sup>78</sup> Wayland Rhoads, "Better Sire Work in Kentucky," *Journal of Animal Science*. 1930: 174-177; "Union Was First County in United States To Have All Purebred Bulls," *Union County Advocate* 2 October 1941.

had Owensboro, a city far larger than any town in Union County, was nearer to other urban markets, and had been the home to a number of prosperous distilleries before Prohibition went into effect in January 1920. The significance of improvements to land and the quality of Union County's soil and crops is particularly indicated by the per acre land value exceeding that of Henderson, which it had split from a little over a century before, at \$79.14, especially as Henderson also had a relatively large city and easier access to the markets of Evansville, Indiana. Land values in neighboring Crittenden and Webster Counties were much lower at \$22.76 and \$52.43, respectively. In 1920, Union County led the region by a wide margin in average assessed value per farm of total farm property, at \$12,003, whereas the next highest county, Henderson, was at \$8,678, and the average value for the Western Coalfields region as a whole was \$5,111.<sup>79</sup>

Despite the rapid growth of the Union County coal industry during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, coal was still second in value to agriculture to the county's economy in 1920.<sup>80</sup> Though fraught with some conflicts over land acquisition, the farmers of Union County shared with coal investors in the economic benefit from the expansion of mining and its accompanying introduction of a regionally and nationally connected railroad. Expansions and technological improvements in both mining and agriculture brought engineered changes to the landscape as it became increasingly focused around energy production.

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<sup>79</sup> Burroughs, *The Geography of the Western Kentucky Coal Field*, 179-180.

<sup>80</sup> Burroughs, *The Geography of the Western Kentucky Coal Field*, 179-197; Bigham, *Towns and Villages*, 195-196.

### ***1930s-1950s: New sources of energy, conservation, and the landscape***

The hybrid energy landscape of Union County continued to be shaped by local and national forces throughout the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. To the county as a whole, the most dramatic of these came in 1942, with the construction of the U.S. Army's Camp Breckinridge; the effects of this camp are covered in subsequent chapters. While the taking of 33,000 acres of land for a military installation brought dramatic change to the county, this represented only roughly 1/7th of the county's area. The story of the remaining 85% of the county's land is less dramatic, though it is still a key part of the ongoing development of the county's hybrid energy landscape. Mining and farming continued to be dominant practices in much of the county, through the biggest story in the development of natural resources during this time was in oil.

As it had been in the nineteenth and first few decades of the twentieth century, the Union County coal industry remained concentrated in the western portion of the county, around Sturgis and Dekoven, from the 1930s through the 1950s. County coal production was affected by decreased demand during the Great Depression, as it was throughout the nation, but it also rebounded in the early 1940s to meet the need of the war effort. Some mine development occurred near Uniontown toward the end of this period, but it was isolated, and the coal resources of the central and east areas of the county remained mostly untapped. The West Kentucky Coal Company (WKCC) was the dominant operator through the 1940s, when it closed or sold off all of its mine holdings in the western portion of the county, the last in 1949. The company continued operations

at Uniontown for a few more years. In addition to its importance in the lives of those who worked or whose immediate family members worked in the WKCC mines, the WKCC's alterations to the landscape also affected the farm families of western Union County.

Union County memoirist George B. Simpson was a child in the Sturgis area in the 1930s and 1940s. His immediate and extended family had farm lands near multiple WKCC mine sites, and along a branch of the WKCC railroad. Simpson recalls that the WKCC dominated the landscape around Sturgis in the 1930s and 40s. Its eight miles of railroad connecting the mines to Caseyville continued to see heavy traffic. The company owned several businesses in Sturgis, including a pharmacy, grocery, furniture store, and gas station.<sup>81</sup>

Simpson particularly remembered the segment of the railway that had been built by the WKCC around 1910-1915, which ran to the south of the core 150 acres of his family's land. The railway was still in use during his childhood, and he recalls observing that “the coal refuse and out fall [sic] spilled orange waters on the soil for many years.”<sup>82</sup> He also remembered three- and four-inch cracks on their Sturgis-area land “running from one end of farm to the other,” which he attributed to deep mine shafts collapsing under ground.<sup>83</sup> Elsewhere in his memoirs, Simpson recalls the pervasiveness of the WKCC in the landscape of his and his family's daily lives, as they were constantly reminded of the

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81 George B. Simpson, *A West Kentucky Farm History (137 acres)(from 1784 to 2003): “sassafrass bushes, dewberries, wild onions and chicken hawks”* (Utica, KY: McDowell Publications, 2003) 88; Kirchner, *A Centennial History*.

82 Simpson, *A West Kentucky Farm History*, 255.

83 Simpson, *A West Kentucky Farm History*, 252.

mine by the sounds of shift whistles, presence of company housing, and coal trains.<sup>84</sup>

The Poplar Ridge Mine was near Simpson's family's land and was the final one in the Sturgis-Dekoven area sold by the WKCC in 1949, though it remained in operation for several years. Union Electric Company of St. Louis bought the mine, calling the branch of the company that ran it the Poplar Ridge Coal Company, and used the entirety of its coal production to fuel its plant in Missouri.<sup>85</sup> In Spring 1956, construction began on a large new Poplar Ridge Company mine east of Sturgis and northwest of Clay, designed to replace the original one which was approaching being mined out. It was scheduled to begin production in early 1958.<sup>86</sup> Construction on this new mine was disrupted when Union Electric sold the company and both mine sites to Peabody Coal Company in Fall 1956.<sup>87</sup> Though Peabody quickly sold the property to another corporation, this was Union County's introduction to Peabody Coal Company, which was already one of the U.S.'s largest coal companies with 30 mines in 6 states.<sup>88</sup>

Expansions and changes in Union County's mining landscape were near constants through the mid-twentieth century. The economic booms in the 1950s spurred a nationwide demand for coal that reached into the Union County landscape in its search for supply. The year 1956 alone had local news paper front pages featuring mine plans and construction nearly every week.

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84 George B. Simpson, *From Pride Station to Pond Fork to One Eye Ridge: South Union County from 1930 to 1955* (Sturgis, KY: G.B.Simpson, 1988).

85 "Popular Ridge Mines Sold To Peabody Coal Co.," *The Sturgis News*, 8 November 1956

86 "Poplar Ridge Coal Co. Starts \$12,000,000 Expansion Program," *The Sturgis News*, 19 April 1956.

87 "Popular Ridge Mines Sold To Peabody Coal Co.," *The Sturgis News*, 8 November 1956.

88 "Poplar Ridge Mines Sold To Peabody Coal Co.," *The Sturgis News*, 8 November 1956.

While the WKCC announced expansion of an existing mine and construction of another near Uniontown, most of the mining activity in Union County remained in the Dekoven-Caseyville-Sturgis area, on the western end of the county.<sup>89</sup> Construction on a new \$6.5 million mine at Dekoven owned by the Dekoven Coal Company had begun in August 1955, with the moving of dirt for the first slope, and work on the mine continued at a brisk pace throughout the subsequent fall, winter, and spring.<sup>90</sup> In early January 1956, Kentucky Utilities energized a 72,000-volt single circuit line that ran 12.2 miles from Morganfield out to the mine.<sup>91</sup> The cooperation of farmers and other landowners along the right-of-way was credited for the swift completion of the line.<sup>92</sup> By the end of March 1956, what had been a farm field not only had an approach road to the mine going through it, but also had a Main Office, Rock Dust House, Oil House, Powder Storage Magazine, Detonator Storage House, and a large Machine Shop and Supply House, all constructed of concrete block and cement, which indicated an intended longevity in the operation. There were also loading stalls and docks at the river, a large rotary breaker, and washing house. The mine began operations in late summer 1956.

A significant innovation of the DeKoven Coal Company mine was a pair of belts, together over 12,000 feet in length, to “transport the coal over hills and through valleys” from its source. One of the belts, measuring over 6,000 feet long, and 36 inches wide, carried the coal from the slopes to the tipple where it was sized and cleaned. The other

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89 “Eastin Says New Mine to Open in Union County,” *The Sturgis News*, 24 May 1956.

90 “New DeKoven Mine Will Start Production In About 90 Days,” *The Sturgis News*, 29 March 1956.

91 The irony of running long-distance lines to power the coal mines producing the fuel for electricity generation persists throughout Union County's history.

92 “Power Line Serving DeKoven Mine Area Is Energized,” *Union County Advocate*, 5 January 1956.

belt, roughly the same length but 42 inches wide, moved the coal from the tippie to the river for loading in to barges. This was at the time the longest coal belt delivery system in Kentucky, and among the longest known anywhere. In comparison, an existing Uniontown belt delivery system had been considered quite long at 4,000 feet.<sup>93</sup> These impressively long coal transportation belts set the stage for future belt delivery systems in the county, which are discussed in Chapter 4.

In late summer 1956, a new coal company organized under the name of Sturgis Coal Co., Incorporated, began work on the land of James S. Sprague, 3 miles south of Sturgis. Officials within the company were all local to Union and nearby Livingston County. As it began construction on its mines, the company already either owned or had leased 2,500 acres of coal rights, all No. 6 coal, and had already contracted its sale. The Sturgis Coal Co. anticipated that their mining operation on this land would last 10-15 years. Theirs was a strip mining operation, with preparation of the land involving the moving of massive amounts of the earth's surface with caterpillar bulldozers and a giant shovel.<sup>94</sup> While this strip mining would ultimately result in a hill of sparse reclaimed pastureland rising above surrounding lush fields of corn and other crops in southwest Union County, it did not signal the beginning of an era of strip mining in the county. It remained one of fewer than a handful of small strip mining operations ever to operate in Union County, its reclaimed surface a landmark of an oddity in the surrounding landscape.

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93 "New DeKoven Mine Will Start Production In About 90 Days," *The Sturgis News*, 29 March 1956.

94 "New Million Dollar Mining Company Organized And Starts Preparation For Mining Just South of Sturgis," *The Sturgis News*, 22 September 1956.



Though some did suffer, when viewed as an entire population, Union County farmers fared better in the Great Depression than many others across the nation. As they had been in the first decades of the twentieth century, as mid-century approached, Union County farmers followed and in some cases pioneered national trends in agricultural technology. Between 1900 and 1940, all-purpose and diesel tractors, multirow planters, hybrid corn, and higher-analysis fertilizers were among the dozens of technical innovations that became available to U.S. farmers.<sup>95</sup> By 1940, mechanization had already resulted in a substantial reduction in the labor-hours required to produce units of corn, wheat, and hay.<sup>96</sup> Both local newspaper coverage of the county's agriculture and the items listed for sale in Camp Breckinridge-motivated farm auctions in the early 1940s demonstrate how in-touch with these national trends Union County farmers were.<sup>97</sup>

Union County farmers became particularly caught up in the post-Dust Bowl nationwide enthusiasm for soil and water conservation, and served as pioneers in some conservation practices.<sup>98</sup> Union County's Soil Conservation District, an organization formed and composed of local people who plan according to local needs, assisted by government and university agencies such as the Soil Conservation Service and Cooperative Extension Service, was formed in 1940, making Union the fifth county in

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95 Bruce Gardner, *American Agriculture in the twentieth century: how it flourished and what it cost* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 9.

96 Gardner, *American Agriculture*, 16.

97 Detailed listings from these auctions are given in the next chapter.

98 For more the early 1930s soil conservation movement, see Douglas Helms, "Hugh Hammond Bennett at the Creation of the Soil Conservation Service, September 13, 1933 – April 27, 1935," United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, Historical Insights Number 9, March 2010. Available at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/about/history/?&cid=stelprdb1044449>.

Kentucky to organize a district. By mid-1954, over 85% of the county's farmers had made official requests with the district for assistance in developing plans for soil and water conservation on their farms, indicating "a desire to use their land within its capabilities and treat it according to its needs."<sup>99</sup>

After the passage of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954, the Union County Soil Conservation District immediately organized to secure funds under the provisions of this federal law for managing the Cypress Creek Watershed.<sup>100</sup> They garnered the support of other local organizations, including the Union County Drainage Board and the Sturgis Kiwanis Club. In responding to concerns about land use rights and the project, C.M. Meacham, representing the Soil Conservation District, emphasized that the district did not have the power to condemn rights-of-way and any work would be done in mutual agreement between individual land owners and conservation district supervisors.<sup>101</sup> The Union County Conservation District also made application for funds for the Eagle Creek Watershed, and for the Highland Creek and Bordley Branch-Bishop Ditch Watersheds, the latter two in cooperation with the conservation districts of Henderson and Webster Counties.<sup>102</sup>

In addition to these moves to implement large-scale, multi-farm soil and water conservation projects, individual farmers continued to work on their own lands, with help

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99 Roy Graff, "County Soil District One Of State's Oldest," *Union County Advocate*, 29 July 1954.

100 Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954, Public Law 83-566 (1954); "Assistance To Be Asked On Cypress Creek Watershed," *Union County Advocate*, 26 August 1954

101 Roy Graff, "All-Out Effort To Get Work On Cypress Creek," *Union County Advocate*, 9 September 1954.

102 Roy Graff, "Aid Is Sought On More Watersheds" *Union County Advocate*, 22 September 1954.

from the Soil Conservation Service. For example, J.B. Holeman purchased a 160-acre farm near Sturgis in the early 1950s; the acreage was “badly eroded and run-down.” Roughly two years after purchasing his land, with direction from the SCS, Holeman had completed the construction of a half-mile long ditch which served combined functions of drainage and diversion, to “protect 27 acres of good bottom land.” Charles Moore, of Uniontown, had seen on his land the common problem of older ditches filling up so high along their sides that surface water could no longer run into them, resulting in both substantial wet patches in fields and new, often erosive, parallel ditches forming alongside the old ones. To remedy this situation, Moore reworked about a quarter mile of his ditch, spreading the accumulated fill back on to low places, seeding the sides of the ditch to prevent erosion, and sloping the sides of the ditch so they could be mowed, to prevent excessive sediment-catching overgrowth. The alterations to this ditch improved the cropability of 10 acres of bottom land for Moore.<sup>103</sup>

The question of land manipulation for conservation is a tricky one. Such actions might be interpreted, in the words of J.B. Jackson, as efforts to “create an entirely new and artificial setting for his [the farmer's] work” with the goal of “a man-made topography, a man-made soil, a man-made crop, all part of a new production process.”<sup>104</sup> Yet, the engineering of the landscape in the name of conservation was not solely out of desire to increase land productivity; farmers were also responding to conditions that had been initiated or exacerbated by previous generations. Much of the erosion that

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103 Roy Graff, “Drainage Ditches Good Protection,” *Union County Advocate*, 4 November 1956.

104 J.B. Jackson, “An Engineered Environment” in *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 230.

conservation measures worked to repair and prevent was a direct result of the land clearing performed by earlier farmers that Jackson glorifies in his writing. Drainage systems that mid-twentieth century farmers sought to improve and maintain were also often direct descendants of those installed by the county's early Euro-American settlers. While the land could have been allowed to grow-over, and efforts make do undo earlier drainage work, in reforestation and reswamping, the land would have lost much of its productive capacity to support the communities of people who had come to live on it.

## ***Oil***

Coal and corn had formed the crux of Union County's hybrid energy landscape since its settlement, but oil began to leave its mark in the second quarter of the twentieth century. Through mid-century, coal mining had been and mostly remained limited to the Sturgis-Caseyville-Dekoven areas and Uniontown, all areas close to the Ohio and Tradewater Rivers, but beginning in the very early 1940s, oil wells spread throughout much of the interior county. There was some disruption in production on the Camp Breckinridge land held by the U.S. military from 1942 through the mid-1960s; however, the development of the oil fields in other parts of the county continued during this time.

Though Lewis Collins, in his 1847 *Historical Sketches of Kentucky*, had noted that “A few miles from Uniontown, on Highland Creek, there is a tar or American oil spring, from which tar or oil constantly flows, in considerable quantities,” the oil resources of Union County were not developed until nearly a century later.<sup>105</sup> Nationally, increasing

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<sup>105</sup> Lewis Collins, *Historical Sketches of Kentucky*, 1847; also as cited in Willard Jillson, *The Geology of*

demand for new, non-volatile fuels to replace dwindling and increasingly costly sperm oil as lamp oil motivated the development of processes to extract and refine oil from coal in the late 1840s and early 1850s. While the coal oil business grew rapidly, it quickly dwindled after 1859, when Pennsylvania entrepreneurs successfully developed the idea of drilling for liquid crude oil, which had better illuminating properties than coal oil. In 1860, oil to which these new drilling methods could be applied was found in Kentucky, as well as in West Virginia, Ohio, and Tennessee, and other states followed in subsequent years. As early as 1865, primitive pipelines were built to carry oil from the well locations to railroads and barges, and by 1874, there was a pipeline transporting 7,500 barrels of oil per day over the 100 miles from Pennsylvania to the city of Pittsburgh. Such pipelines would soon stretch over far greater distances. Before 1900, petroleum had been used to make fuel oil for furnaces, lubricating oil, grease, paraffin, tar, and, most demanded, kerosene lamp oil. The turn-of-the-century development and improvement of gasoline engines, and the automobiles and airplanes they soon powered, dramatically increased the demand for petroleum, which in turn led to more exploration for sources of oil. World War I amplified this demand for oil, as oil rather than coal fueled many Allied ships and the vehicles used to transport troops. The U.S. supplied roughly 80% of petroleum used by Allied forces, as it continued to meet growing domestic demand. This continued demand inspired oil exploration in areas such as Union County in subsequent decades.<sup>106</sup>

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*Union County Kentucky* (Louisville: The Standard Printing Company, Inc.) 1943.

106 Dudley J. Hughes, *Oil in the Deep South: A History of the Oil Business in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, 1859-1945*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi 1993) x-5.

From the birth of the U.S. crude oil industry in 1859 to the mid-twentieth century, the U.S. annually produced more oil than the combined production of all other nations; in 1952, it still generated 52% of global production, though that percentage has dropped dramatically in the intervening three-quarters of a century. Private ownership of mineral rights has been credited for the extended dominance of the U.S. in oil production. In most other nations, where minerals are government-owned, those seeking to explore for oil must have considerable time and financial resources to negotiate government bureaucracy and corruption to gain drilling rights. While Chapter 3 of this dissertation addresses some of the myriad struggles over mineral rights, including those that occur when the U.S. government has possession of large tracts of land and the coal and oil under it, and when surface rights and mineral rights are separated, having mineral rights be generally held and managed by private owners typically enables more exploration and the drilling of more, smaller wells.<sup>107</sup> This phenomenon was certainly seen as the 1940s and 50s brought an explosion of oil wells on the Union County landscape.

Tests for oil began as early as 1872 in Union County. Reports from Dr. Wallace Lee in 1916, on the behalf of the Kentucky Geological Survey, observed odors of kerosene, and slight oil films were present at some shallow water wells in the county. Gas and salt water were also being produced by an old water well; all of these were signs of potential oil resources. Nevertheless, Lee asserted, “The only economic deposit of any value in the area is coal. Interest in oil has been manifested from time to time but the

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<sup>107</sup> Hughes, *Oil*, x-xv. See also: Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster) 1991; Harold Williamson, Ralph Andreno, and Arnold Daum *The American Petroleum Industry* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press) 1963.

indications are not very promising.”<sup>108</sup> Despite this report, in 1918, the Betty B. Oil and Gas Company drilled an oil well to 1,984 feet at a spot  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles south of Spring Grove on the Sol Blue farm, that had oil in eight separate horizons. Despite its potential, there was uncontrollable salt water at the bottom of the well, which forced it to be plugged and left.<sup>109</sup>

In March 1920, another well was drilled on the Blue farm, roughly  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile from the original, to the depth of 5,955 feet, thought to be the deepest well ever drilled in Kentucky at the time, and possibly for several decades after. The well hit oil and gas at various depths between 698 feet and 5370 feet. Like other small wells drilled in Union County in the early 1920s, the second Blue well was not significantly developed at that time.<sup>110</sup>

When well tests resumed in 1941, larger and larger test drilling rigs moved in, and as rumors of oil encounters came out of the testing sites, trading in oil royalties began.<sup>111</sup> The county's first producing well was drilled in late October 1941, five miles west of Morganfield, and one mile from the Blue farm wells, with estimates that it would yield between 100 and 200 barrels per day.<sup>112</sup> Oil well development continued in the vicinity of this well and in lands around and between Morganfield and Uniontown throughout 1941 and 1942.<sup>113</sup> By fall 1942, the Uniontown oil field was considered the “hottest spot” in

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<sup>108</sup> Wallace Lee, as quoted in Jillson, *The Geography*, 40.

<sup>109</sup> Jillson, *The Geography*, 40.

<sup>110</sup> Jillson, *The Geography*, 41.

<sup>111</sup> Jillson, *The Geography*, 41, and “New Test Starts Brisk Trading in Oil Royalties,” *Union County Advocate*, 28 August 1941.

<sup>112</sup> “Strike Oil on Reburn Land Near Morganfield,” *Union County Advocate*, 30 October 1941.

<sup>113</sup> “Expect Further Oil Development,” *Union County Advocate*, 18 June 1942; “Report Oil At New Test Near Uniontown” *Union County Advocate*, 20 August 1942.

western Kentucky for oil development, with new-high prices being paid for oil rights and wells already in production, being drilled, and planned.<sup>114</sup>

In September 1942, efforts began to secure easements on which to construct a 4- to 5-mile pipeline from an area of the Uniontown oil field with multiple wells to a point just below the mouth of Lost Creek on the Ohio River.<sup>115</sup> While oil pipelines were beginning to crisscross the nation at this time, and while coal had previously traveled across the lands of multiple property owners on the Union County landscape via train, this 1942 oil pipeline was a harbinger of coming changes in the landscape as Union County's fossil fuel wealth was tapped and transported from the county's interior to regional and national markets. In the case of this pipeline, as would be the case with later coal belt lines constructed, such as the one earlier mentioned at Dekoven, a resource now moved across the landscape as part of an infrastructure that, unlike roads and most of the railroads before it, was exclusively dedicated to one commodity. This established this commodity's solid footprint on the landscape.

At the end of December 1942, V.L. Spalding attributed having missed several weeks of writing the *Advocate's* Uniontown “news and views” column to having been taking oil leases on lots within the city limits of Uniontown for an Owensboro firm. As Spalding intimated, “If present plans do not miscarry, it won't be long until oil derricks in Uniontown will be so thick that the old town will resemble in appearance an asparagus bed in the spring time.” Spalding described the oil wells just outside of town as “thick

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114 “Oil Rights Under Land Bring \$8,600,” *Union County Advocate*, 22 October 1942.

115 V.L. Spalding, “Secure Easements To Lay Pipe Line From Oil Wells To River,” *Union County Advocate*, 1 October 1942.



now as the 'hair on a dogs [sic] back,'" with additional good producing wells "being started every day." The "black gold" was transported by pipe lines to storage tanks near the city limits.<sup>116</sup>

Oil activity continued throughout the 1940s in Union County, with the peak of the decade considered to be the March 1948 opening of an oil field south of Morganfield that supported four years of nearly continuous drilling.<sup>117</sup> Discovery of this pool was significant enough to be declared the "best Kentucky discovery in 1948" by the Western Kentucky Oil Scouts Association and to warrant an entire Kentucky Geological Survey bulletin devoted to it, which was published in 1955.<sup>118</sup> By the preparation of that publication, the Morganfield South pool was producing oil from seven different formations, two sandstone beds in the Pennsylvanian system and four sandstone beds and one limestone in the Mississippian.<sup>119</sup> By 1 May 1952, drilling in the pool had yielded 133 producing wells with combined production of over 2.9 million barrels. Since producing oil deposits were found in multiple overlapping horizons, oil companies had to construct some unusual well formations. There were some wells drilled in twin or triplet formations, within a few feet of each other, each reaching down to access different reservoirs of oil. In other cases, a single well drew oil from more than one reservoir.<sup>120</sup>

Following the 1948 opening of the Morganfield South Pool, the next major spike

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116 V.L. Spalding, "Well Derricks Now Thickly Dot Uniontown Area," *Union County Advocate*, 24 December 1942.

117 "County Oil Operations Reach Greatest Peak Since 1948 As New Pool Discovered," *Union County Advocate*, 22 April 1954.

118 Boyne Wood, *Geology of the Morganfield South Oil Pool*, Kentucky Geology Survey, Series IX, Bulletin No 14 (1955), 7.

119 Wood, *Geology*, 5.

120 Wood, *Geology*, 7.

in oil activity in Union County began in 1954. A flurry of new drilling activity culminated in the discovery of a new pool of oil one mile northwest of Morganfield in April. The first well in that pool was expected to produce between 500 and 2000 barrels of oil per day.<sup>121</sup> As rotary drilling rigs popped up across the county, additional wells were promptly drilled in that pool and continued to be drilled in other pools throughout the county.<sup>122</sup> Near weekly, the *Advocate* was filled with news of productive new wells in known fields and wildcat wells; the descriptions evoked darts landing on targets: “six miles northwest of Morganfield,” “one mile north of Morganfield,” “three miles northwest of Morganfield,” and “one mile northwest of Waverly,” “two miles north of Waverly.” Uniontown and Spring Grove, as well as existing wells and oil fields, were also used as reference points for descriptions of new drilling.<sup>123</sup> While the process of testing for and drilling wells was in fact neither particularly fast nor cheap, the *Advocate’s* constant and breathless-toned coverage of the oil exploration, which detailed well events and production levels not just by the day or hour but down to spans of 2½ minutes, gave the sense that the county’s oil industry was developing at an unstoppable pace.<sup>124</sup>

These waves of intense development of oil fields in central and eastern Union County helped to make the hybrid energy landscape a truly county-wide phenomenon.

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121 “County Oil Operations Reach Greatest Peak Since 1948 As New Pool Discovered,” *Union County Advocate*, 22 April 1954.

122 “Development of New Oil Field Continues,” *Union County Advocate*, 6 May 1954.

123 For example, “County Story of Oil is Progress,” *Union County Advocate*, 27 May 1954; “Oil Activities in County Continue At Brisk Pace,” *Union County Advocate*, 3 June 1954; “George I. Engle Hits Jackpot On His No. 1 R.M. Cain Well,” *Union County Advocate*, 12 August 1954.

124 e.g. “George I. Engle Hits Jackpot On His No. 1 R.M. Cain Well,” *Union County Advocate*, 12 August 1954.

While wells were relatively compact once installed, the sheer number of them created a striking change in the landscape, as pumps and tanks and other structures of oil recovery popped up out of fields and pastures. In addition to the visual change to the landscape, by the mid-1950s, the cost of Union County's oil boom to agriculture and the environment was becoming evident. For example, after Henry Clements claimed that over 15 acres of his farm land had been “permanently damaged” by salt water flowing from oil pits, he sued those working as and for the Illinois Exploration company, and was awarded \$5600 for the damage on 30 November 1956.<sup>125</sup> Thus the oil boom also signified the conflict that would be embedded in the hybrid energy landscape as it continued to spread across Union County, particularly into areas that had not been part of the long history of coal mining (See Figure 2.1).



*Figure 2.1: A contemporary photo showing an oil well in the middle of a soybean field, with both farming and mining frastructure in the background. Taken near Uniontown in 2011.*

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<sup>125</sup> “Jury Gives Farmer \$5,600 For Damages,” *Union County Advocate*, 6 December 1956.

By the mid-twentieth century, the engineered hybrid energy landscape of Union County was in place. New, extensive railroad development in the late 1800s had both supported and stimulated mining and agriculture, while linking them through their shared infrastructure. Both extraction of coal and oil, and agriculture, grew in response to increasing demands in the first decades of the twentieth century, and made use of developing technologies. While the hybrid energy landscape would continue to develop around the county, the early 1940s brought a major shift in land and underground mineral and oil ownership on over 30,000 acres, which had long-lasting implications for the landscape of not only those acres, but also the rest of Union County and much of the Western Coalfields region.

### Chapter 3: A Disrupted Landscape— Camp Breckinridge and its Legacy in Union County

In 1941, the Kentucky Writers' Project of the Works Projects Administration published *Union County Past and Present*, as part of its *American Guide Series*. The book spoke of Union County as a “distinctly agricultural community” with “a thriving coal-mining industry.”<sup>1</sup> Despite the hard economic times that the United States, and the general U.S. farm population in particular, had suffered in the preceding decades, the guide authors presented the farmers of Union County observed in 1940 as “progressive” and full of “optimism.” The book included an extended quote from C.T. Newman, which it presented as representative of the county's farmers, which included the statement: “I will take farm life in preference to any other life on earth.”<sup>2</sup>

Ruby Higginson, writing with nostalgia in 1978 about the Union County landscape in the 1930s, echoed Newman as she illustrated an idealized interpretation of farm life at the time:

The farming community in the tri-county area [Union, Henderson, Webster] was prosperous during the thirties, as the U.S. economy was gradually recovering from depression years. The size of the farms in the area ranged from a few acres to 1100; the average was 100 acres. The land was cultivated, groomed, and well-kept. Fences encircled the picturesque settings to contain the grazing livestock. The homes ranged from small modest structures to large modern houses. The money crops consisted of corn, tobacco, wheat, and clover hay for cattle. Cattle, hogs, and sheep were raised for easy income. Cattle and tobacco barns were visible on each small farm, and the larger farms supported many large structures.

The country community was very similar to other prosperous farming communities in the United States; a farm consisted of a white frame house framed

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1 Kentucky Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration. *American Guide Series: Union County Past and Present* (Louisville: Schuhmann Printing Co., 1941), 3, ix.

2 Kentucky Writers' Project, *Union County*, 65.

with tall shade trees with a vegetable garden nearby. Fruit orchards, a chicken house, and a barn for livestock gave the appearance of a quiet little park. Acres of cultivated land surrounded the buildings. The size and number of barns denoted the prosperity of the farmer.<sup>3</sup>

The year 1942 brought immediate and radical changes to the lives of many Union County farmers, which had long-term effects on individual families and the Union County landscape: the U.S. military began the construction of Camp Breckinridge, a World War II training facility with a large artillery range. Of the 36,000 total acres of land that were ultimately condemned for the camp, around 33,000 acres were in southeastern Union County, with the rest in neighboring Henderson and Webster counties.

While the development of the Union County landscape had been substantially influenced by military affairs since the surveys for Revolutionary War veteran land grants in the 1780s and the defense of those land grants in the early 1800s, Camp Breckinridge would prove to substantially influence the hybrid energy landscape of agriculture and fossil fuel production that had been developing for over 150 years. From the surveying in 1941 through its dismantling in the mid-1960s, the camp overlaid a military landscape onto the county's farming, mining, and oil production, both bringing the reality of the demands of national defense directly to the Union County community and demonstrating how overpowering the fulfillment and management of those demands could be. In militarizing a (mostly) continuous area covering nearly one-seventh of the county, the camp created a massive, unified block of land, cache of natural resources, and

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3 Ruby Higginson, *Land of Camp Breckenridge: Injustice to the Farmer* (self-published, 1978), 14.

community of displaced farmers, none of which had previously been unified. These imposed structures affected the local economy and communities not only during the war and while the camp was active, but also in the subsequent years. The deepest and most enduring controversies occurred after the camp was declared surplus and rather than being returned or offered directly back to the pre-Camp owners or their heirs, both the land and underlying mineral rights were sold at auction.

While studies that involve land acquired for military purposes do exist, I have not found scholarship in historical, geographic, or related disciplines on a situation in the United States like that of Camp Breckinridge.<sup>4</sup> After researching and writing about the

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4 Previous scholarship and policy of the effects of military bases in the U.S. on communities and environments have followed three main strains. First, they have been concerned with the environmental effect of toxic weapons used or stored at the bases, and of the effects of bases on vulnerable aspects of the environment, such as endangered species (e.g. Stephen Dycus, *National Defense and the Environment* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996); D. Loomis, *Combat Zoning: Military Land Use Planning in Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1993); Valerie Kuletz, *Tainted Desert: Environmental and Social Ruin in the American West* (New York: Routledge, 1998). Along this same environmental strain are studies that advocate for the examination of military areas as potential partners in conservation (e.g. Coates, Peter, et al. "Defending Nation, Defending Nature? Militarized Landscapes and Military Environmentalism in Britain, France, and the United States." *Environmental History* 16 (2011)). Second, they have focused on how communities reacted to being suddenly and in most places permanently cut off from pieces of public domain that they had long used for such purposes as grazing, hunting, and recreation once those lands became restricted to military use (e.g. *Combat Zoning*). Third, they have examined the economic and political impacts of base closure (e.g. Goren, Lilly. *The Politics of Military Base Closings: Not in My District* [New York: P. Lang] 2003). Rachel Woodward in *Military Geographies* ([Blackwell] 2004) covers aspects of all of these, but with a focus on British military installations. Len Ackland's *Making a Real Killing: Rocky Flats and the Nuclear West* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1999) also touches on all of these in its examination of the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant, though at the time it was published there was still plutonium stored at the site, and once this was removed in the early 2000s the site remained under government control as a national wildlife refuge.

While having aspects of the first and the third of the strains, the case of Camp Breckinridge differs significantly from those covered in these accounts and from the Rocky Flats situation. While there were some environmental impacts from the base and training conducted there, they were not the sort of penetrating and enduring effects as experienced on lands used for nuclear weapons testing and manufacture. Also, the actual active use of the base at its full capacity was so brief, just a few years, that while it brought a temporary economic boom, there was not sufficient time for the economy of the whole area to become focused around it as often happens in areas with more permanent installations. I have found no other scholarly accounts that share a story of American military acquisition of private

camp situation, and in making plans to continue this scholarship, I hypothesize that part of the reason for the lack of publications on such military land acquisitions and disposals is their complexity and the sheer messiness of the documentation surrounding them. As will be discussed later in this chapter, many relevant government documents from the original land acquisition are known to have been either purposefully or accidentally destroyed. While I have examined several federal-level court cases, there remain a tangled web of cases filed at the local level to be tracked down and sifted through. The *Union County Advocate* diligently reported on the camp from rumors of its coming in 1941 to litigation over the land disposal in the 1970s. This chapter relies heavily on *Advocate* reporting from this time; that it is the best or among the best source available for coverage of many events is corroborated by its having been a key source for court documents assembled about these decades in the 2000s.<sup>5</sup> The past three decades of ongoing efforts by the landowner heirs to receive compensation have been less closely covered by the *Advocate*, as developments have been scattered and there have been no real changes in the situation, but other documentation of these efforts exists. Legislation and litigation related to the camp lands remained unresolved and has gone unattended to for years at a time. Ruby Higginson's 1978 self-published booklet on the controversy, *Land of Camp Breckinridge: Injustice to the Farmer*, has been an extremely valuable source for developments up to that time, but its purpose was primarily to persuade and secondarily to document. As the camp forms a portion of the development of Union

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land and subsequent disposal of this land that closely resembles that of Camp Breckinridge.

5 e.g. *Land Grantors in Henderson, Union v. United States*, 64 Fed. Cl. 661, 2005 U.S. Claims LEXIS 89 (1 April 2005).



County's hybrid energy landscape, but is not the central focus of my dissertation, I did not feel I could justify archival expeditions, to attempt to track down Department of Justice files on the federal-level legal cases, for example; I hope to access such sources as I continue to research the Camp Breckinridge saga. Essentially all aspects of the camp's relationship to the Union County landscape have been complex and in many cases confusing, and my own struggles to puzzle through the over seventy years of activity have resulted in what is at times a convoluted narrative in this chapter.

While the military's actual presence in Union County was limited to well under two decades in the mid-twentieth century, the land that was taken for the construction of Camp Breckinridge established a legacy that continues to have reverberations in the landscape well into the 2000s. The manner by which the land acquisition, and its subsequent disposal, were handled, established a level of reluctance and distrust surrounding large-acreage public and private projects in the county. While appropriation of land for military camps occurred across the nation and elsewhere in Kentucky prior to and for the purposes of World War II, the extremely high quality for crop production of the land that was taken in Union County distinguishes it from the majority of land appropriated elsewhere. Furthermore, since as the half-century-long controversy over the camp involved not only the natural resource of surface land but also exceptionally rich subsurface resources of coal and oil, it helped to set the stage for the ensuing conflict and cooperation in land use for agriculture and mineral extraction.

### ***Building toward Breckinridge***

As U.S. involvement in World War II became seemingly inevitable, the country's leadership realized that it needed to build the strength of its armed forces, which necessitated the rapid construction of training facilities for new soldiers. In 1941, the Real Estate Branch of the Army began efforts to set up more than a dozen training centers throughout the U.S., which would require the acquisition of over 8 million acres of land. Early in the process, the Government attempted to work one-on-one with individual property owners to negotiate land purchases, but this process was perceived to be too slow.<sup>6</sup> To expedite the process of getting land for the training camps, the Government invoked the so-called "War Purposes Act" which had been passed 2 July 1917, which "authorized Secretary of War to institute condemnation proceedings for acquisition of land, to purchase land, and to accept donations of land."<sup>7</sup> While the Government still attempted negotiations in the land acquisitions, as the pressure to build the camps mounted, time spent on negotiations shrank and condemnation proceedings grew throughout the nation.<sup>8</sup>

In early Summer 1941, rumors began circulating that one of the new military camps might be located in Union County.<sup>9</sup> Throughout that summer, the *Advocate* provided regular updates that had been funneled through letters to Kentucky's senators

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6 Land Grantors in Henderson, Union, and Webster Counties, Kentucky and their Heirs v. The United States, 93-648X (U.S. Court of Federal Claims 1 April 2005).

7 War Purposes Act of 2 July 1917, 50 U.S.C. § 171 (1917).

8 Land Grantors in Henderson, Union, and Webster Counties, Kentucky and their Heirs v. The United States, 93-648X (U.S. Court of Federal Claims 1 April 2005).

9 "May Get Camp, Rifle Range," *Union County Advocate*, 12 June 1941.

and local civic groups who had probed for information, news stories running in Washington, and “unofficial, but reliable” sources, which alternately indicated that a camp was coming and not coming.<sup>10</sup> The *Advocate* seemed to take multiple stances on the possible coming of the camp, reflecting the varied reactions that people in the county were having. In June, articles in the *Advocate* spoke eagerly of the camp's coming, and the newspaper published an editorial stating those who were concerned about people in the proposed camp area having to move their homes had “The Wrong Attitude,” claiming “they would be well paid and would probably get better places in which to live” (no mention of farms was made in this editorial). The editorial asserted that everyone should gladly give up whatever was needed to help the U.S. Government fight “Communism, Nazism, Facism, and all of the other 'isms,’” pointing out that “if the dictator menace keeps branching out, what good will it do any person in his own county to own his own home?”<sup>11</sup>

When the plans for the camp, contingent on need and funding, were confirmed in August 1941, the *Advocate*, after pointing out the alarm of those who farmed and lived on the lands to be used in its front page article, took a more guarded stance on the camp. The paper backpedaled on some information it had hinted at earlier about the local Young Men's Business Club working to draw the camp and a state senator conferring with the

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10 e.g. “Government Has No Plans Now For Artillery Range,” *Union County Advocate*, 10 July 1941; “War Department Selects County Site For Army Camp If Land Forces Expanded,” *Union County Advocate*, 24 July 1941; “ARMY CAMP TO TRAIN 30,000 MEN,” *Union County Advocate*, 7 August 1941.

11 “Hopes Brighten For Rifle Range,” *Union County Advocate*, 19 June 1941; “Editorial: The Wrong Attitude,” *Union County Advocate*, 19 June 1941.

War Department, asserting that neither the Morganfield City Council nor any local civic club had petitioned for Union County to become the site of defense development, and claiming that “It can be stated as a fact that the War Department selected the camp site without advice from any local source or from any member of the congressional delegation from Kentucky.” The paper also asserted that neither local authorities nor Kentucky's Congressmen had any power to have the location of the camp changed.<sup>12</sup>

These flip-flopping stances by the *Advocate* and uncertainties about the role that local and state political leadership had or did not have in the selection of the site for the camp convey both the confusion over what was actually happening and the internal strife for many individuals in the county. Farmers and other local residents held both intense connections to their lands and intense patriotism for the nation that they saw as having facilitated their lifeways on the farm as “free and independent,” to return to the words of C.T. Newman. Being called on to give up their lands in the service of national defense and in opposition to international forces of tyranny both tugged on their beliefs in American national ideas and caused them to question whether those ideals were being violated through the forcing of citizens to give up their property. An editorial in the 4 September 1941 *Advocate*, titled “If the Cantonment Is Built,” conveyed the mood in the county:

If we guage [sic] public opinion correctly, the citizenship of the county is willing to make any necessary sacrifice for national defense; and there will be many called upon to sell their homes and their farms. Those citizens residing in what may be the cantonment area are confronted with what may be an immediate problem, that of finding a new and suitable place to live and acreage on which

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12 “ARMY CAMP TO TRAIN 30,000 MEN,” *Union County Advocate*, 7 August 1941.

they can continue in the only business they know—farming. Their's will be the big sacrifice.

Though the actual construction of the camp was still dependent on assessed need and appropriated funds, headquarters for surveying potential lands were set up at the American Legion Post in Morganfield.<sup>13</sup> As it began surveying the lands for the likely-to-be-built camp, the Real Estate Division of the War Department took a paternalistic attitude toward the farmers in the area. A.R. Ernberg, the Department's project manager for the camp, “warned farmers against timber buyers and real estate sharks who might invade the affected area seeking to buy both land and timber at low prices.”<sup>14</sup> The *Advocate* pushed those conducting the surveys for more information, but were ultimately left giving the advice that farmers should just proceed with agricultural activities as in any other year.<sup>15</sup> Agricultural imperative—demands resulting from the requirements of plants for growth and grain production—added another element to the farming community's struggle over national pride and property rights that accompanied the coming camp.

Some of the farmers in the potential camp area attempted to redefine the best use of the land in the interest of national defense. On Saturday, 6 September, Waverly farmer Pete Roberts began circulating a petition against the inclusion of productive farmland in the camp. This petition led to a meeting with around 200 in attendance on the evening of Tuesday, 9 September, in Boxville, a community mostly contained within the area

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13 “CITY GETS CAMP HEADQUARTERS,” *Union County Advocate*, 14 August 1941.

14 “Farmers In Camp Area Advised To Go Ahead With Crops,” *Union County Advocate*, 21 August 1941.

15 “Understandable Anxiety” (editorial), *Union County Advocate*, 21 August 1941.

considered most likely for the camp. The spokesmen for those at the meeting who wished to keep farmland out of the camp noted that “production of foodstuffs is vital to national defense” and that the county's ability to produce food would be reduced by removing some of the most productive acres in the county, then under survey, from farming. They also pointed out how removing these acres from private ownership to government ownership would hurt the county's tax base.<sup>16</sup> Despite the local support for their arguments, and national attention being given to the importance of food production in preparation for wartime, their campaign to stop the takeover of farmland did not halt the progress being made toward the construction of a military camp in the county.<sup>17</sup>

The fall of 1941 continued to be full of activity and speculation. Nearly every week, the *Advocate* published front-page updates about the surveys and plans being made for the possible camp, while also reminding its readers that nothing was certain, and publishing statements from government and military officials confirming that, indeed, nothing was certain. In late November, when the camp was increasingly seeming to be a certainty, a War Department spokesman was quoted as saying, “As for the farmers, we want to give them every protection. The fact some of our representatives have called on farm agents, and they in turn have called upon farmers in proposed camp areas has no

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16 “Protest Inclusion Of Productive Acreage In Site For Cantonment,” *Union County Advocate*, 11 September 1941.

17 For more on food production on the home front during World War II, see Amy Bently, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998) and E.M. Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012).

special significance except that the farmers should be thinking of where they would move if the government bought their land.”<sup>18</sup> A 27 November headline stated that “Farmers Assured 'Adequate' Pay For Land” and quoted General E.B. Gregory, quartermaster General of the U.S. Army, as saying in a letter to Kentucky's Second District Representative Beverly Vincent that if farmlands were purchased for the camp, “The occupants would be allowed ample time to make necessary arrangements to obtain dwellings and farms elsewhere.”<sup>19</sup> Some farmers believed that if they did have to give up their land, it would mean that they or their sons would not be drafted into military service for the war.<sup>20</sup>

The *Advocate* reported on 4 December 1941 that the ranks of surveyors who had been laying out the possible camp were leaving the area and that the building of the camp was still very uncertain.<sup>21</sup> Within days, the 7 December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor and subsequent declaration of war made the camp seem far more likely. Yet, still no official notice was given. As late as 18 December, the *Advocate* reported that farmers were still being told to proceed with contracts for 1942 crops.<sup>22</sup> Throughout January, Union County anxiously watched, not only as the U.S. became officially embroiled in the war, but also as more and more military bases which had only been proposed before Pearl Harbor

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18 “Promise 'Plenty Notice' To Camp Area Farmers,” *Union County Advocate*, 20 November 1941.

19 “Farmers Assured 'Adequate' Pay For Land,” *Union County Advocate*, 27 November 1941.

20 Higginson, *Land*, 23. Some exemptions were given to farmers due to their essential role in food production for the war effort, though I have not come across documentation of these in Union County. See R. Douglas Hurt, *The Great Plains During World War II* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 154-155 and Selective Service System, *Agricultural Deferment* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947).

21 “Survey Employes [sic] Leaving Daily,” *Union County Advocate*, 4 December 1941.

22 “Washington Spokesman Says Camps To Be Built,” *Union County Advocate*, 18 December 1941.

became reality. In mid-January, property condemnations began for the construction of the training camp that would become Fort Campbell, 95 miles south of Morganfield on the Kentucky-Tennessee border. At the same time, Federal officials announced the taking of 73,000 acres in Hardin and Bullitt Counties for the expansion of the existing Fort Knox military reservation. This intensified the likelihood that a camp would be built in Union County, creating a network of the three facilities in the region.<sup>23</sup>

On Friday, 6 February, an official announcement came from Washington D.C. through Cincinnati to Morganfield lawyer G.I. Drury, who was also serving as the head of the camp survey real estate division. The announcement stated that 99 tracts covering 10,470 acres would be acquired for the camp; all of this land was in Union County, though it was already anticipated that land in Henderson and Webster would be taken also. The announcement stated that the government would first seek to acquire the land through direct negotiation with the landowners; if that failed, condemnation suits would be used.<sup>24</sup>

The first extensive list of landowners to be affected by the camp acquisition was published in the 12 February 1942 issue of the *Advocate*, with the note that “some of the finest farm land” in Kentucky was among that included in the acquisition.<sup>25</sup>

Advertisements for farms for sale in Henderson, Daviess, Webster, and McLean Counties

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23 “No Definite Word About Cantonment,” *Union County Advocate*, 22 January 1942; “400 Families Must Move in Fort Knox Area,” *Union County Advocate*, 22 January 1942.

24 “Expect Immediate Construction To Start On Buildings In U.S. Army Cantonment Area,” *Union County Advocate*, 12 February 1942. The 10,470 was a slight overestimate of the 10,427 that was actually taken at that time.

25 “Many Fine Farms in First Section Big Camp Project,” *Union County Advocate*, 12 February 1942.



appeared in this same issue. The petition to condemn 10,427 acres of land under the War Powers Act was actually filed by the U.S. District Attorney on 14 February 1942.<sup>26</sup> On 16 February, Deputy U.S. Marshal O.A. Denton of Owensboro began to serve Orders of Possession and Notices to Vacate to the landowners, which, depending on the individual, stated they would have until either 3 March or 17 March to vacate their lands.<sup>27</sup>

Monday, 16 February, was also a nationwide “R-Day” proclaimed by President Roosevelt, the first since the U.S. had officially entered the war. That day all unregistered Union County males between the ages of 20 and 44 had to appear at specified locations in their voting precincts between 7am and 9pm to register for the military draft and acquire their draft cards<sup>28</sup> By the day's end, 929 Union County residents were newly registered for the draft.<sup>29</sup> On that Monday, Rice Cleveland both registered for the draft and was the first Union County farmer to be served notice that he would have to vacate his land in the camp cantonment area by 3 March.<sup>30</sup> This was an immediate indication that the expectation held by some local farmers that having their lands appropriated for the camp would keep their sons from being drafted for military service in the war would not be realized.

In addition to the unfortunate timing in the specific case of Rice Cleveland, the juxtaposition of headlines in the *Advocate's* 12 February 1942 issue conveyed the broader

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26 United States v. 10,427.70 Acres Situated in Union County, Kentucky, No. 74 (W.D. Ky. filed Feb. 14, 1942).

27 “Property Owners Have Until March 3 and 17 To Evacuate,” *Union County Advocate*, 19 February 1942.

28 “Men 20 to 44 Must Register Monday,” *Union County Advocate*, 12 February 1942.

29 “929 Register in Union County,” *Union County Advocate*, 19 February 1942.

30 “First Notice Served On Rice Cleveland,” *Union County Advocate*, 19 February 1942.

tension of Union County in wartime. The headlines confirmed that land would be taken for the camp, announced mandatory draft registration, listed those who had been drafted, and noted local residents' commitment to ongoing purchase of war bonds. Union County, in particular its farm population, was not only being asked to make the same sacrifice as was being asked of the people around the U.S. and world, to provide the human instruments of the war, but was also being asked to give land and with it, in many cases, livelihoods. As the editorial column in the 19 February *Advocate* stated, "These people in the cantonment area are giving up their homes—places that under any other circumstances money could never buy." The same editorial page asked "Has anyone ever referred to the army camp to be built on some fine farm land here as a 'topographical error'?".

In an attempt to provide a source of accurate information about the camp, Union County's University of Kentucky Agricultural Extension Agent R.H. Ford called a meeting on 17 February at the county court house. The meeting drew 350 farm men and women. The manager of the camp project, Willard Ewing, and the chief negotiator, J.M. Canary, fielded questions about the acquisitions of land for the camp and moving of residents, yet many of these questions could not be answered clearly, including the exact boundaries of roughly 20,000 acres of additional land that would be taken for the camp imminently.<sup>31</sup> In meetings like these, newspaper articles, and other public forums, agents and administrators of the County Agricultural Extension Service and the Soil

Conservation District found themselves mediating between the farmers they had long

31 "Exact Boundaries and Date for Acquisition Not Known," *Union County Advocate*, 19 February 1942.

worked with and the government that was now asking them to help direct the actions and responses of those farmers.

In a 12 March 1942 editorial, the *Advocate* staff expressed frustration at the level of wartime sacrifice that Union Countians were being forced to make compared to quibbles elsewhere in the country that were hampering the war effort, specifically conflicts between labor and management about overtime and payment in shipyards and other war equipment factories that prevented production of ships, planes, and tanks to meet the demands of the war effort. The editorial implored:

In Union County many people have been forced from their homes to make room for an army camp. These people did not want to leave their farms. Many of them have been unable to purchase other lands and are now out of employment. What must they think when they read about labor-management controversies, about five day weeks and forty hour weeks, about how our military forces could be winning the battle of the Dutch Indies and the Philippines if they only had a few more bombers and fighting planes? (...) The United States and the President as Commander-in-Chief cannot... expect one group of citizens to make every possible sacrifice and allow other groups to adopt a business as usual policy.<sup>32</sup>

Despite such public outcry, plans for the camp moved forward.

While Union County farmers were being informed that they would have to give up their farm lands, they were also continuing to be told how important their food production efforts were to national success in the war. Eberley Davis, supervisor of the Union County Soil Conservation District, emphasized the importance of maintaining quality pastures to “winning the war and writing the peace,” as good pastures are necessary to maximize livestock production. Davis encouraged Union County farmers

“to do their part in aiding the cause of freedom” by improving and maintaining their

<sup>32</sup> “The Most Important Front,” *Union County Advocate*, 12 March 1942.

pasturelands.<sup>33</sup> The language used to encourage farmers to plan their fields with the war effort in mind took on a military tone:

In order to do his part in meeting the problems brought about by this emergency, each Union County farmer must set up a 'selective service system' for the acres that he is operating. This 'land selective service system' must place each acre of land in the use that will enable it to make the maximum contribution to the cause of freedom.

To manage his land so as to enable each acre under his control to contribute its share toward winning the war and at the same time preventing the waste of the productive capacity of the soil should be the goal of every farmer. Much of the cost of the war and the ability of our country to maintain the way of life for which we are fighting is dependent on the ability of the farmers to attain this goal.<sup>34</sup>

Earlier in the year, the *Advocate* shared highlights from a report released 27 January 1942, by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, stating how the implementation of conservation practices in recent decades had prepared U.S. farms to meet food production needs of war time. The Union County Soil Conservation District's report had been one of the 653 nationwide on which national SCS Chief Hugh Hammond Bennett based his “optimism that the farm lands of the United States can stand the strain of war production.”<sup>35</sup>

In addition to wisely managing their land, farmers were also reminded of the need to conserve such materials as rubber and burlap so that they could, as the Kentucky USDA War Board Chairman described, “make a significant contribution to the war effort in addition to their planned increase in food production.”<sup>36</sup> Later in the spring, in April

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33 “Pastures Also Have Their Place in Winning Victory,” *Union County Advocate*, 19 February 1942.

34 “Asks Farmers To Make 2 Major Adjustments,” *Union County Advocate*, 26 March 1942.

35 “Says Farmlands Ready,” *Union County Advocate*, 5 February 1942.,

36 “Farmers Eligible to Apply for Tires for Farming Implements,” and “Farmers Urged to Save Burlap Bags,” *Union County Advocate*, 19 February 1942.

1942, the U.S. government, through the Union County U.S.D.A. War Board, called for Union County farmers to increase the acreage of hemp grown for seed in the county. Only 1,500 acres of hemp had been grown for seed in the entire United States in 1941, yet due to the increased need for the fiber for rope and ship building for the war effort and near-elimination of the import supply, much more hemp seed needed to be produced so that it could be used to grow hemp fiber the following year. The U.S. Government implored Kentucky to grow 33,000 acres of hemp seed in the summer of 1942, yet most of the counties in the commonwealth did not have significant acreage of land suitable for its cultivation. Accordingly, the War Board called for Union County farmers to increase their planned production of hemp seed—200 acres—to 700 acres, which it believed they would do when they realized how “urgent” the need was.<sup>37</sup> County farmers more than answered the call, ultimately raising 1,200 acres of hemp seed.<sup>38</sup> Union County farmers were also encouraged to use their land to support livestock production through the “Victory Pig Club,” a program through which farmers enrolled certain pigs and committed to use the money earned from the sale of those pigs to purchase war bonds and stamps.<sup>39</sup> In mid-February 1942, as the first formal evacuation notices were being given, the Cooperative Extension Service and Vocational Agriculture teachers from the high schools taught six “schools” on producing food that would contribute to the war effort, including poultry and egg production, dairy cow feeding, and home garden planning.<sup>40</sup>

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37 “Hemp Meeting Here Friday,” *Union County Advocate* 2 April 1942; *Hemp for Victory*, directed by Raymond Evans (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1942).

38 “Hundreds Needed To Harvest Large Corn, Hemp Crops,” *Union County Advocate*, 27 August 1942.

39 “More Farmers In Victory Pig Club,” *Union County Advocate*, 9 July 1942.

40 “Plan 6 ‘Victory Food’ Meetings,” *Union County Advocate*, 19 February 1942.

Through imperatives to produce commodities that would both directly and indirectly support the war effort, farmers were being told that production from their farmlands was essential to winning the war, yet efforts on the part of Union County farmers to have their most productive lands exempted from the camp acquisition had failed. A significant portion of the Union County lands that had been used in compiling Hugh Hammond Bennett's report, that could have been used to pasture livestock, and that could have been converted to hemp production, were not fully available for wartime agricultural production due to their inclusion in the camp. Both the efforts of the Camp Breckenridge-area farmers and the resources of their lands were, in essence, being double-counted toward the stockpiles available for the war effort. Yet, the functions of crop production and troop training could not occupy the same acres in the Union County landscape, and so it was only the militarized version of the camp-area landscape that could ultimately serve the war effort.

### ***The war comes to the farm***

Despite the alleged importance of their farming activities to the war effort, the Union County farmers affected by the first round of camp land acquisitions spent the spring of 1942 not establishing a selective service system for their fields or planting a hemp crop, but rather scrambling for either a place to continue farming or scrambling to sell off their equipment and stock since they would not be able to continue farming. Farmers contacted on 16 February as part of the just-over 10,000 acre acquisition were

given until 28 February to accept the government's offer for their land. As Land Acquisition Section project manager Ewing stated, "Failure to sign the option leaves but one alternative for the government—condemnation." By 26 February, owners of approximately 6,500 acres had signed options accepting the offers.<sup>41</sup> The deadline for signing was extended to 7 March, by which time 85% of the affected landowners had signed. Immediately after the deadline, the U.S. government instigated condemnation proceedings in federal court for the remaining 15%. This litigation did not delay the building of the camp, as the War Department took possession of the lands whether or not an official contract had been signed.<sup>42</sup>

Regardless of whether they had signed their options in the proscribed time, turning over their farms was not easy for any of the affected farmers. As Ruby Higginson summarized, "The camp was accepted as a farmer accepts the loss of crop from flood or hail stones breaking tobacco leaves. The residents reluctantly agreed to relinquish their homes and land until the war was over."<sup>43</sup> In the last week of February 1942, dramatic physical changes began on land that was still closely identified with the local farmers who had owned it. Grading machinery arrived at the cantonment site near Morganfield, onto what the *Advocate* still referred to as the "Paul Thomas farm." This machinery arrived to move 1,200,000 yards of dirt as part of an effort to level off the site.<sup>44</sup> By the first week in March 1942, bids were taken for contracts to construct

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41 "Finish Options On 6,500 Acres For Camp," *Union County Advocate*, 26 February 1942.

42 "Secure 85 Percent Signatures On Options," *Union County Advocate*, 12 March 1942.

43 Higginson, *Land*, 23.

44 "First Army Cantonment Contract Let; Company Begins Huge Grading Job," *Union County Advocate*, 26 February 1942.

hospital buildings, industrial and warehouse buildings, and electrical, sewer, and garbage disposal infrastructure in the camp, with the agreement that the winning contractors would actually begin construction the next week.<sup>45</sup> The Illinois Central Railroad added siding track for supplies during camp construction and added a railroad spur into the cantonment area.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to the construction, March 1942 was filled with apprehension and speculation about when and exactly which additional lands would be acquired for the camp. Also in March, a batch of the Union County residents who had participated in the mandatory draft registration on 16 February had their numbers called, the first being Bryant Lyles. Lyles worked as a farmhand on the John M. Griggs estate, near Waverly, and was among those individuals who experienced multiple effects of the war effort, as lands belonging to his employer were among those that had been taken in the first major acquisition for the camp.<sup>47</sup>

The end of March brought the War Department's notification of Union County officials that the camp would be named after John Cabell Breckinridge. Despite prior suggestions from Union Countians that the camp be named after a prominent local citizen, Breckinridge had been born and educated in and around Lexington. He had served as Vice President of the United States under President James Buchanan in the late 1850s. He had been nominated for President in 1860, but Lincoln defeated him. He

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45 "Bids Opened on Huge Army Camp Project," 5 March 1942, included in Peyton Heady, *History of Camp Breckinridge* (Morganfield, KY: self-published, 1987).

46 "Weather Slows Up Grade Job At Camp Site," *Union County Advocate*, 12 March 1942.

47 "Bryant Liles, 41, Gets First County Call," *Union County Advocate*, 19 March 1942.



joined the secession movement and was a Major General in the Confederate army, serving in multiple major battles; he also served as Confederate President Jefferson Davis's Secretary of War from January to April in 1865. He fled to Europe after the war and practiced law.<sup>48</sup> On top of the suffering that the local residents experienced in having to turn over their family farms, they saw the resulting camp named after someone who both had essentially no connection to Union County or Western Kentucky, and who held dubious status even as a hero in the nation's history. As part of the ongoing uncertainty and lack of information distribution regarding the camp, requests by local persons to find out who had selected the name were denied.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, after long weeks of apprehension, the next stage of land acquisition for the camp officially began. On 31 March, the largest condemnation suit of the camp acquisition process was filed in Federal court in Louisville, for over 19,500 acres in Union and Henderson counties, which increased the total acreage of the camp to nearly 30,000 acres.<sup>50</sup> The added acres stretched from the area south of Highway 56 to Highway 60, essentially between the communities of Boxville and Waverly. Contained in this new land area were approximately 300 surface tracts and 50 mineral tracts. As in the first large acquisition, Deputy U.S. Marshall Denton served official notices to the landowners, beginning on 2 April. The condemnation filings gave the U.S. government the right to immediately occupy the land, but farmers were given until noon on 18 May to

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48 "Army Camp Named In Honor Major John C. Breckinridge," *Union County Advocate*, 2 April 1942.

49 "It's Okeh To Call It Camp Breckinridge; Official Notice Here," *Union County Advocate*, March 1942.

50 United States v. 19,517 Acres Situated in Union and Henderson Counties, No. 77 (W.D. Ky., filed Mar. 31, 1942). Note that the *Advocate* reported the acreage as slightly higher, as 19,596.6 acres. "Suit Filed to Acquire 19,595 More Acres," *Union County Advocate*, 2 April 1942.

vacate their property.

Information about appraisals of the property was handled by the Land Acquisition Office, headed by Ewing and operating out of the American Legion Building in Morganfield.<sup>51</sup> Upon learning of the appraised values of their land, most landowners were displeased and took immediate action to appeal the appraisals; by the first week in April they were organizing meetings and preparing letters of protest to be sent to elected officials.<sup>52</sup> In calling the first large public meeting to be held about protesting the appraisal values, organizers noted that land values throughout Union County had skyrocketed with the coming of the camp, from 50 to 100% more than they had been previously. This compounded the difficulty of affected farmers trying to relocate within the county.<sup>53</sup> On 14 April, over 400 people attended the first protest meeting in Boxville. By the end of the evening, 100 owners of 12,000 acres had signed a petition, which was then forwarded to President Roosevelt, Senator Alben Barkley, Senator A.B. Chandler, and other officials. In the petition, the landowners asserted that they had been put in a “take it or leave it situation,” and because the values offered for their land were roughly 50% of its actual worth, “we cannot purchase other land without paying prices entirely out of comparison with the prices the Government is offering us for our property.” The petition also spoke of the commitment of the landowners to supporting the U.S. war effort: “we believe that our patriotism and desire to do everything in our power to save our country and to win the war, cannot be successfully questioned by anyone.” The

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51 “Suit Filed to Acquire 19,595 More Acres,” *Union County Advocate*, 2 April 1942.

52 “Offers Displease Camp Area Group,” *Union County Advocate*, 9 April 1942.

53 “Offers Displease Camp Area Group,” *Union County Advocate*, 9 April 1942.

petition concluded by emphasizing that the landowners had faith that “the Government” wished to provide them fair compensation, but that the appraisers and those telling the landowners they had to accept the low appraised value of the land had “misrepresented” the government. The petition asked for new appraisers to assess the land value and for the landowners to be allowed to have input in the appraisal process.<sup>54</sup>

Union County Judge Tom T. Richards handled communications with the elected officials, enclosing copies of the petition in letters he send to them on 22 April. Richards received return letters dated 24 April from Senators Barkley and Chandler, Congressman B.M. Vincent, and State Director of the Office of Government Reports Lorenzo K. Wood. Barkley's letter stated, “I appreciate your bringing this matter to my attention and shall be glad to take it up with the United States District Attorney for the Western District of Kentucky, uring [sic] that it be looked into and that every possible consideration be given to the statements contained in this petition.” Congressman Vincent's reply stated, “The citizens who are being deprived of their farms have my entire sympathy, and I assure you I shall do everything in my power to see that they receive just compensation for their lands. I am taking up this matter with the War Department at once and passing on to it the petition which you forwarded to me for its consideration.” Chandler's and Wood's replies expressed similar sentiments.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the petition, by 22 April, Willard Ewing had reported that 30% of landowners had accepted the government appraisals for their land in the nearly 20,000-

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54 “100 Landowners Sign Petition Of Protest,” *Union County Advocate*, 16 April 1942.

55 “‘Every Consideration’ Is Promised Petition Signers,” *Union County Advocate*, 30 April 1942.

acre acquisition in the three weeks since it had been announced.<sup>56</sup> By 13 May, over half of the landowners in the area taken for Camp Breckinridge had signed options with the War Department's Land Acquisition Section. They were strictly told there would be no extensions to the 18 May deadline for vacating their property.<sup>57</sup> Some landowners did receive a one-week extension, to 25 May.<sup>58</sup> Though the number of landowners signing was continuing to grow, those seeking additional compensation for their lands continued their efforts.

In early May, two representatives of the Cincinnati office of the Land Acquisition Division, Robert Tyler and Judson Harmon, arrived in Union County in response to the petition received by the War Department in protest of the appraisals. They found “general dissatisfaction among property owners,” with only two of the many people they interviewed expressing satisfaction with the price they received. They reported their findings to a small group of the affected property owners at a meeting on 7 May, but they stated that they did not have the authority to promise that there would be a reappraisal.<sup>59</sup>

On 23 May, President Franklin Roosevelt wrote a letter to Judge Tom T. Richards stating that there would be no reappraisals of land values in the camp area. He said that the War Department had investigated the appraisal process at Morganfield and determined that the appraisers had been well-qualified to make impartial and unbiased appraisals in the area. Roosevelt said that appraisal supervisors had reviewed the

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56 “30 Percent Land Owners Accept U.S. Appraisals,” *Union County Advocate* 23 April 1942.

57 “Over Half Camp Landowners Sign Options,” *Union County Advocate* 14 May 1942.

58 “EXODUS OF FARMERS” (photo caption), *Union County Advocate*, 21 May 1942.

59 “Government Men Find Farmers Not Pleased With Offers,” *Union County Advocate*, 14 May 1942.

appraisals and determined that “the values placed on the properties are liberal and in line with present economic conditions in the community.” Roosevelt used the voluntary acceptance of the appraisals by 70% of the camp-area landowners as appearing “to confirm that view,” since they had “voluntarily agreed to convey their property to the Government at prices based upon the appraisals.” Roosevelt noted in the letter that landowners did not have to give the Government an option “at a price which does not meet with his or her approval,” but the War Department would then get the property through condemnation proceedings.<sup>60</sup>

President Roosevelt's letter was a blow not only to the affected landowners, but to the morale of the county as a whole. An editorial in the 4 June *Advocate* contradicted the president's assessment of the appraisal situation, asserting that his source of information must have been either “wholly misinformed” or “incompetent.” The editorial called some of the appraisals “so out of line as to be ridiculous” and claimed there had been “gross inconsistency” in values assigned to adjoining and comparable acreages. The editorial went on to state that “With one possible exception the appraisers sent to Union County, were unfamiliar with both land and land values in this section. Most of them were from outside the state. Even in casual conversation with farmers their ignorance of farm values was evident.” The editorial questioned Roosevelt's claim that the signing of options by 70% of the landowners indicated that the appraisals were “liberal,” noting, “The landowners did not have much time to think about their situation, and many of them did not have the resources to finance the purchase of another farm,” calling their signing

<sup>60</sup> “No Camp Reappraisals, Roosevelt Says,” *Union County Advocate*, 28 May 1942.

of the options “a last resort.”<sup>61</sup> At a May meeting, local man R.R. Taylor asserted his belief that the motivation of 95% of those who had signed options was to have the right to purchase the buildings on their land, which it was implied would only be granted to them if they signed.<sup>62</sup>

On Wednesday, 10 June, Land Acquisition Department head William Stevens, announced that condemnation proceedings were already in the early stages for lands desired for Camp Breckinridge for which options had not yet been signed by the owners. He said an effort would be made to stop the proceedings if landowners came in to sign their options that week.<sup>63</sup> The camp was steamrolling across Union County, and the landowners in its path had both little time and little power to stop it.

Despite Roosevelt's letter and the condemnation proceedings, some Union Countians did proceed with suits already in progress for reappraisals of their lands, namely those who could afford the costs of litigation.<sup>64</sup> In early May, Henderson Attorney L.C. Fluornoy Jr. had petitioned in Federal court in Owensboro for “speedy adjustment” to assuage the plight of all the farmers affected in the nearly 30,000 acre land acquisition.<sup>65</sup> As will be discussed later in this chapter, there was nothing speedy in the early court proceedings regarding the camp lands, nor would actions accelerate as litigation and attempts at legislative intervention to compensate the affected landowners

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61 “The President and Land Values,” *Union County Advocate*, 4 June 1942.

62 “Government Men Find Farmers Not Pleased With Offers,” *Union County Advocate*, 14 May 1942.

63 “Camp Breckinridge Land Cases Being Certified For Confemnation,” *Union County Advocate*, 11 June 1942.

64 “The President and Land Values,” *Union County Advocate*, 4 June 1942.

65 “Asks Settlement for Landowners,” *Union County Advocate*, 7 May 1942.

and their heirs dragged on for over half a century.

### ***Underground complications***

Oil and gas rights in the Camp Breckinridge area further complicated the land acquisition and payment story. At the time of the camp land acquisition, there was not the widespread and near-complete division between surface and mineral rights that already existed elsewhere in Kentucky and now exists in Union County. Some landowners were already leasing rights to drill for oil to private companies, typically with a flat sum per acre having been paid up front and an additional smaller payment per acre each year for the duration of the lease. Allowing for oil and gas drilling on their land was viewed by some farmers as a relatively low-impact (estimated surface area required for a well was no more than one acre) way to earn supplemental income.<sup>66</sup> Though oil and gas rights were not typically cited in the appraisals, the government took possession of them along with the land. Early in the land acquisition process, there were reports that the government, to obviate the messiness of dealing with the leases, simply paid the companies holding the leases “an amount equivalent to the sum the oil firms had invested in the property.”<sup>67</sup> As the camp lands expanded, roughly 20,000 acres were acquired that had oil and natural gas leases; the oil companies involved, including Sun, Pure, Gulf, Texas, and Kentucky Natural, began meeting in a group with Ewing “to discuss the sale of oil and and gas rights in the camp area.”<sup>68</sup>

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66 Higginson, *Land*, 13-14.

67 “Government Buys Oil Leases in Camp Area,” *Union County Advocate*, 26 February 1942.

68 “Oil Lease Question Up For Discussion,” *Union County Advocate*, 23 April 1942.

Results of these oil and gas lease negotiations were announced in December 1942. The government gave the companies holding oil and gas leases two options. One was to postpone activity and “accept a moratorium on the lease for a period of the emergency and six months,” which prohibited exploration and other activities on the lands, but also did not require payments to the U.S. government, who was by then the landowner. This option stated, in writing, that “at the expiration of the period of emergency and six months,” the leases would restart and run the duration that had been agreed upon before the camp took possession of the lands. Option two stated that “in the event scattered acreage is owned, or for other reasons acceptable to the lease owner, a moratorium is not desired, the United States will pay to the lease owner for all his right, title, interest and claim, the sum of \$5 per acre.” Oil and gas lease owners were able to choose which option they preferred and then both they and the attorney representing the government signed contracts.<sup>69</sup> Despite having not been involved in these negotiations, multiple camp-area landowners reported that the value of oil lease payments they received between the time the government took possession of their lands and these agreements were made between the government and the lease holders was deducted from the payment they eventually received for their lands.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the county's long history of coal mining, there was little, if any, active mining in the area selected for the camp prior to 1942. According to a 1941 Army Corps

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69 “2 Oil And Gas Lease Settlements Proposed,” *Union County Advocate*, 10 December 1942.

70 Higginson, *Land*, 24-34; *United States v. 5,400 Acres Situated in Henderson, Union, and Webster Counties*, No. 88 (W.D. Ky., filed Mar. 8, 1943); *Land Grantors in Henderson, Union v. United States*, 64 Fed. Cl. 661, 2005 U.S. Claims LEXIS 89 (1 April 2005).



of Engineers report, there had been only one coal mine in the area needed for the camp; it had been in the Chalybeate Hills area and had been abandoned since 1940 because the mining operation was too costly to be profitable. In the late 1970s, Ruby Higginson collected multiple affidavits stating there had been coal mines open in the camp area at the time the land was taken.<sup>71</sup> Regardless of whether or not mining activity was present, government appraisers placed no value on potential coal mining rights in the camp area, and accordingly the land owners did not receive compensation for them.

### ***More for the camp***

The land acquisitions still did not stop at 30,000 acres claimed in Spring 1942. Several small land acquisitions occurred throughout Summer 1942.<sup>72</sup> In late October 1942, 5,400 additional acres of land were condemned for addition to Camp Breckinridge. This land spanned Union, Henderson, and Webster Counties, bounded to the north roughly by Highland Creek and on the south along Highway 56 from just along Boxville to the intersection with U.S. Highway 41. Deputy U.S. Marshal O.A. Denton once again delivered orders of possession to the land owners, and the War Department took over the land. R.L. Higginson was the largest land owner in this 5,400 acre addition, with a farm of just over 800 acres near Tilden, near Webster County, which included a spacious

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71 "BLC takes issue with proposed payment, feels government 'downplayed' importance on coal and oil deposits," *Union County Advocate*, 27 December 1979.

72 e.g. *United States v. 824 Acres in Union Couty*, No. 81 (W.D. Ky., filed June 22, 1942). The complete sequence of these small takings is listed in *Land Grantors in Henderson, Union v. United States*, 64 Fed. Cl. 661, 2005 U.S. Claims LEXIS 89 (1 April 2005).

modern home near Highway 56. The Nealle Tapp family, who had already lost 300 acres to camp acquisitions, lost another 605 in this acquisition, along with their home.<sup>73</sup>

Additional smaller acreage acquisitions occurred in 1943 and 1944, including just over 1,000 acres near Sturgis for an air field in October 1943.<sup>74</sup>

In a matter of less gravity than the price paid for the land itself, but still of immediate concern for the affected farmers, was the harvesting of the crops they had been instructed to proceed with planting on their land. In early May 1942, Ladd Skinner of the Land Acquisition Section of the General Services Administration posted a warning in the Union County courthouse to farmers in the camp takeover area that crops growing in their fields must not be damaged or used for stock grazing, and that they must not harvest them, even if they had entered into contracts for those crops as they had been advised to do. The warning stated:

Attention of property owners of land lying within the boundaries of Camp Breckinridge is called to the fact that by Court Order of April 1, 1942, all crops within the area are the property of the United States government and may not be harvested by the owner or tenant.

This applies whether or not the property owner has signed an option. Provisions are being made for harvesting of said crops. Any removal of said crops, or any damage to said crops will result in a deduction of the payment made to the owner for his land, inasmuch as the crops have been separately appraised and their value added to the price being paid for the land. Damage to crops by pasturing must be avoided.<sup>75</sup>

The crops were declared government property even if the farmers still had not entered

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73 "5,400 More Acres For Camp Breckinridge," *Union County Advocate*, 29 October 1942.

74 e.g. *United States v. 16.37 Acres Situated in Union County Kentucky*, No. 134 (W.D. Ky., filed May 12, 1944). Other small acquisitions listed in detail in *Land Grantors in Henderson, Union v. United States*, 64 Fed. Cl. 661, 2005 U.S. Claims LEXIS 89 (1 April 2005). Note that the air field was transferred by the U.S. government to Union County following World War 2 and became a municipal airport.

75 "Camp Area Crops Must Not Be Harvested Or Damaged," *Union County Advocate*, 7 May 1942.

into an official agreement to sell their lands. That the appraisals for the land, already considered too low, also included payment for the crops, caused additional distress for the farmer-landowners. Bidding processes were held to determine who would harvest the maturing crops in the camp area, including wheat, rye, barley, and winter oats. An implement dealer from Sturgis, G.C. Davis, won the contract from the War Department for harvesting thousands of tons of alfalfa and red clover hay and seed.<sup>76</sup> Fruit, mostly apples, from orchards in the camp area was distributed to charitable organizations by the GSA.<sup>77</sup>

For those farmers in the camp area who were either downsizing their farming operations or leaving agriculture altogether, there was an immediate need to offload what they had on hand. Notices of auctions of livestock, farm implements, home goods, and other items continued from the first evacuations throughout the spring and early summer. The 16 April *Advocate* alone had four ads for camp-vacating auctions taking place within the week. Ray Brinson, whose farm was “2 miles north Boxville and Waverly on Highway 141” listed “equipment and stock which I am selling in order to vacate for the Army Camp” for an auction on 21 April. Animals to be sold included Hereford beef cows with calves, Jersey milk cows, sows and pigs—“good ones,” ewes, mules, and a mare. Farm equipment included cultivators, plows, and mowing and hay baling equipment, in addition to a wagon, a buggy, and tools. Brinson also sold posts, “15 Ton Good Hay,” “300 Bushels Good Corn,” in addition to a cider mill and household and

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76 “Over Half Camp Landowners Sign Options,” *Union County Advocate*, 14 May 1942.

77 “Fruit In Camp Area Will Go To Charity Organizations Free,” *Union County Advocate*, 25 June 1942.

kitchen furniture. With such a liquidation of livestock and equipment, it seems likely that Brinson was leaving farming all together, though the sale of furnishings from his home and kitchen makes one wonder if he was leaving an entire lifestyle as well.

The Griggs Brothers, whose farm was a mile west of Highway 141 and 5 miles south of Waverly, made it clear that the camp was ending their farming careers, stating in their ad from the same issue, “On account of our farm being taken in the Army Camp area, thus being forced to quit farming, we will offer for sale....” The Griggs also offered diversified livestock, including 14 cows with calves and 10 cows nearing calving time; farm implements; farm improvement supplies, including over 2000 feet of lumber and fence supplies ; and household and kitchen furniture, in addition to a Model T Pickup Truck.<sup>78</sup>

As deadlines set by the General Services Administration for Camp area farmers to move grew closer, those listing auctions stepped up their language. In the 7 May paper, for example, there was an ad placed by Houston Spencer touting “The last BIG SALE in the camp area” to be held on his farm on Tuesday, 12 May, “at 10 a. m. war time.” Spencer's ad promised fat cattle, 1000 bushels of corn, 250 bales of hay, and a long list of farm implements, in addition to household goods, a cook stove, porch swings, and a Chevrolet sedan. The ad claimed that “Every item listed in this sale is in splendid condition.”<sup>79</sup> In the 14 May *Advocate*, an advertisement claimed “The last sale in the camp area” was to be held on Monday, 18 May, again “at 10 a. m. War Time.” Jim Lynn

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<sup>78</sup> Advertisement, *Union County Advocate*, 16 April 1942.

<sup>79</sup> Advertisement, *Union County Advocate*, 7 May 1942.

offered a long list of things to be sold at his farm three miles east of Morganfield, off Highway 56, including a dozen milk cows some with calves and some about to calve; 10 sows and 60 feeding shoats; a pair of work mules, a saddle mare, and a yearling filly; 200 chicks; tons of hay and hundreds of bushels of corn; an Allis-Chalmers Combine and John Deere Tractor Plow, both used only one season; plus other farm implements and two baby beds.<sup>80</sup>

Though many of these auction listings indicated that families forced to leave the camp were permanently giving up farming as a livelihood, other ads indicated that there was demand for land onto which farm operations could be moved. The 16 April *Advocate* included an ad placed by Utley and Goehring, land agents with their office in downtown Henderson. Under large text of “Farms For Sale,” the agents spoke directly to the displaced camp farmers:

Are you worried? We are Land Doctors and we will give you prompt relief. Read a partial list of our remedies—

The five properties they described in the ad ranged from 48 to 120 acres, so not far from the average size of farm that was being vacated in the camp, though their ad stated at the bottom, “We have larger farms if desired.” Two of the five properties listed promised “IMMEDIATE POSSESSION,” and four of the five were listed as including mineral rights, likely a nod to concerns brought up in the camp land appropriation.<sup>81</sup>

As farmers struggled through the process of actually leaving their homes and lands, their plight cast its shadow on most activities in the area that spring. A significant

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<sup>80</sup> Advertisement, *Union County Advocate*, 14 May 1942.

<sup>81</sup> Advertisement, *Union County Advocate*, 16 April 1942.

chunk of the rural population of Union County and its adjacent areas was in distress because of the construction of the Camp. Nevertheless, for some in Union County, particularly the business owners of Morganfield, the coming of the camp brought an unprecedented level of urban prosperity. Some experienced excitement and economic growth at the same time as others were suffering alienation from their lands and financial hardship. Patriotism dominated the rhetoric that attempted to mediate the divide.

At the first raising of the flag over Camp Breckinridge in early May 1942, a descendant of General John Cabell Breckinridge, Attorney Landon Cabell Flournoy Jr. spoke. The former Morganfield resident, who was also currently involved in the land appraisal litigation, stated, “There never has been a camp here since the county was organized in 1811... and sufficient reason for its being here now is that Kentucky is the garden spot of the universe and Union County is the asparagus bed.” Also speaking at the flag raising was Major Sullan Cohen, who was part of the Army leadership in the Camp construction. Cohen explained that “Geographically speaking Camp Breckinridge is yours; constructionally speaking it is ours; actually speaking it is the property of all America.” Cohen expressed sympathy for those who had been forced to relinquish their farms.<sup>82</sup>

Though landowners had vacated their properties by May deadlines, many of them, including ones who had not been protesting the appraisals of their lands, had still not received the payment for their lands by August. At a conference in Louisville, Eli H.

Brown III, United States Attorney, told Morganfield Mayor Waller Young that the money  
82 “First Flag Flies Over Camp Breckinridge,” *Union County Advocate*, 14 May 1942.

had been ready for their payment since June and “he was of the opinion landowners knew about it.” The *Advocate* countered that in fact many landowners did not know about it, and the majority of them had been attempting to find out when they would receive payment. The landowners had to submit an application to Brown's office in Louisville for the money.<sup>83</sup> In September, Ben Strother, an attorney for the Department of Justice announced that the former landowners could start applying for their money in Henderson at his office, rather than writing to Louisville.<sup>84</sup>

### ***Stories of leaving the land***

While the lists of items sold at auction, ongoing struggles over appraisals, and general difficulties in receiving payment indicate some of the anguish that accompanied farmers leaving their lands, much more about the frustrations experienced by individual farmers can be learned from their individual accounts. In preparing her own report on the struggle of the Camp landowners in the late 1970s, Ruby Higginson, daughter of R.L. Higginson, part of whose farm had been acquired in October 1942, collected testimonies from a number of affected farmers and their families. As Higginson noted in her report, by the time she collected the stories, many who had been involved no longer wished to talk about their experiences because it was too painful. The accounts that were collected, even though they were taken years later and some were filtered through Higginson's language, provide more details about what families experienced.

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83 “Money Ready For Camp Area Landowners,” *Union County Advocate*, 20 August 1942.

84 “Camp Landowners May File For Money At Henderson,” *Union County Advocate*, 10 September 1942.

The Blue family, consisting of a husband, wife, and young daughter, had a 112 acre farm with a home, barn, and other buildings which they had improved with electricity and modern appliances. They had a diversified and integrated livestock operation of cattle and hogs, which depended on the property's pond, ample supply of well water, and grazing pastures. When the camp came, the land was appraised at \$56 an acre, approximately the same as “depression give-away prices.” The Blue family did not have the financial resources or time to fight the appraisal in court, and had to accept the appraised value because they needed the money to relocate, and were promised they would receive their payment immediately. With few options, the family had to rent an unelectrified house on a dirt road that was often impassable during rains; the barn on the property leaked, and quickly ruined much of their equipment and animal feed. The Blues did not receive payment for their land for seven months, by which time they were forced to sell their cattle and hogs because of insufficient pasture at their rental farm, and Mr. Blue had to take a job with a lumber company operating at the Camp. The family had to leave rental properties multiple times because the owners wanted to use the houses and farms, and it was not until seven years after leaving their original farm in the Camp are that they finally found a permanent and comfortable home.<sup>85</sup>

In October 1977, Jessie Russell Wood gave her account of events to her daughter. Mrs. Wood and her husband had purchased their 54 acre farm near Boxville in 1923, which included a house, barn, stables and other buildings, for around \$3,000. For the following 19 years, they invested all they made back into the farm, building additional

<sup>85</sup> Higginson, *Land*, 36-38.



structures and fences, both remodeling and electrifying the house, and setting out a three acre orchard. According to Mrs. Wood,

In the early part of 1942, appraisers came and looked at our place and told us to go to Morganfield and sign some papers. They kept handing us papers and said sign here, and we did as we were told, but they never said how much we were to get for our farm or when we would receive payment. All they said was when the war was over they would give us our home back. They told us all they wanted was a place to train our soldiers.

They temporarily moved to an older home just outside of the Camp boundary, and asked to purchase the home from their farm and move it to land they owned in Webster County. The government refused their request, and used the house as part of a “dummy town” for hand-to-hand urban combat training. They settled into their temporary home and put out a new crop and garden. In July, the family was visited by the government land acquisition agents again, and told they had to leave the farm and house they had moved to “in twenty-four hours or they would come and set us out.” According to Mrs. Wood, “We had no previous warning that they were taking more land. They just took what they wanted and that was that.” The Wood family could not find a farm in the area to inhabit, as all the land that had been available had been occupied by others earlier displaced by the camp. They moved their family in with relatives. While their land on the north side of Highway 56 had been taken, they were able to keep their land on the south side, where they kept their livestock, though it was at a distance from the house where they were staying and feeding and watering chores required two long round trips each day. Mrs. Wood recalled that the soldiers camped across the road from their livestock farm used their hay for bedding without payment, and that “they were going to barbeque a pig of

ours but my husband got to them in time and they gave it back to us.” By April 1943, the Woods had still not been paid for their land, nor received any notice about when they might expect payment. After writing a letter to a Henderson lawyer, the Woods received a check for \$2,200 in June 1943 that was dated October 1942. The value of an oil and mineral lease on the farm had been deducted from the payment.<sup>86</sup>

Other accounts of landowners displaced by the camp vary in the details of where and how many times families had to move, what they lost both materially and spiritually, and how they coped with the change in their lives. The accounts share the feeling of haste with which families were required to leave their land, assertions that they were promised that they would be able to get their land back after the war, and the sense that, even decades after the lands were taken, there were still deep-seated feelings that they had been made to suffer injustice beyond what was required for the war effort. These common threads in the experiences of those who had owned the land that became camp Breckinridge reveal why the legacy of the camp sits so heavily in the county and in the diaspora of individuals who were forced out of the county by its construction.

The sting of being forced off their land, and for many being forced out of farming entirely, was harshened by the turn that the American farm economy took nationally during wartime. Wartime demand brought the opportunity for farmers to produce at maximum capacity and receive prices that were often well above parity. As Gilbert Fite has noted, echoing the conclusions of most agricultural historians of the period, because of the increased farm income, it was a time of great prosperity for the general American

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<sup>86</sup> Higginson, *Land*, 46-49.

agricultural community, and “many farmers bought more land, paid off debts, raised their living standards, and put money in war bonds and other savings.”<sup>87</sup> Locally, those in Union County who retained their farms shared in this prosperity. The average value per farm of farm products sold or used in Union County had been \$1,726 in 1940, and had increased to \$4,045 in 1945. The total value of farm products sold or used in the county had been \$2,062,333 in 1942, and had increased to \$3,746,057. Even when considering wartime inflation, this total increase is especially indicative of war-era prosperity, as Union County had been home to 1,217 farms in 1940, whereas after the camp's construction it held only 940. The county's land area had been 94.3% farms in 1940, whereas in 1945, it was only 76.2% farms, a loss almost entirely accounted for by the camp lands.<sup>88</sup>

### ***A militarized landscape***

In addition to the movement of the population, change in land use from primarily agricultural to military brought extensive changes to the physical landscape. Continuing what had begun with the massive grading of earth and construction of essential buildings in Spring 1942, change and new infrastructure swept across the camp acres. Most existing buildings on the farms were sold and removed.<sup>89</sup> Over the years of its occupation, the military constructed over 1,400 buildings on the camp lands, in addition

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<sup>87</sup> Gilbert Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: 1865-1980* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1984).

<sup>88</sup> “Kentucky—Statistics for Counties,” U.S. Census of Agriculture 1945: Volume 1, Part 19 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946). The 1945 Census included the 1940 values in side-by-side tables.

<sup>89</sup> “Buildings On 45 Farms To Be Sold,” *Union County Advocate*, 6 August 1942.

to the few dozen farm houses they had left standing and made use of.<sup>90</sup> One of the largest earthen dams at the time in Kentucky was built near Highway 56 to create a reservoir lake, 84 acres at maximum 20 foot depth. The dam was 1000 feet long and 25 feet high, with width growing from 15 feet at the top to 300 feet at the bottom. Though not a site of heavy building, one of the most affected sections of the camp lands was the 10,000 acre impact area, shared by thirty ranges for training in weapons firing.<sup>91</sup> For decades following World War II, both unexploded and pieces of exploded munitions were found on these acres.

After World War II, Camp Breckinridge was placed on inactive status in February 1946. Beginning in January 1947, area farmers were notified of the opportunity to lease farmland within the camp boundaries. Camp Breckenridge became a training center for those recruited under the compulsory peacetime draft passed in 1948, and remained so through mid-1949, when the camp was again deactivated. In 1950, the camp was reactivated for training during the Korean conflict, and then was placed on inactive status again at the end of 1953, though the National Guard used it for summer training of reserve troops until 1959. The government declared the camp surplus to the needs of the Department of Defense in December 1962.<sup>92</sup>

### ***After the war***

After the war and the bulk of the soldiers left Camp Breckinridge, the camp lands

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90 Heady, *History*, 6.

91 Heady, *History*, 11

92 Higginson, *Land*; Heady, *History*.

represented a 33,000 acre blank spot on the map of Union County economic activity. New hope for the camp sprung up periodically. In early 1954, as the Air Force was seeking a site for the new Air Force Academy, Union County briefly held out hope that Camp Breckinridge would be chosen, which would have brought permanent, military-based economic activity to the area.<sup>93</sup> Breckinridge was quickly rejected as a potential site, and the Academy was ultimately located in Colorado.

When the camp seemed destined for long periods of inactivity between military uses, there were often proposals for economic development of the lands. For example, in 1954, Olin Industries, a chemical development and manufacturing company, expressed interest in siting an explosives plant on 1500 acres of land in Union County. Initially they examined farmland between Morganfield and Uniotown; however, the per-acre price this high-quality, privately-owned farmland would command proved to be undesirable, as well as separate ownership of oil and coal rights and existing mining operations under part of the site. As Olin's plans progressed, their first choice for a site became land in the northeast corner of Camp Breckinridge, along Highway 60 near Waverly. Discussions were held at the Pentagon in April 1954 about the possibility of selling or leasing this land to Olin.<sup>94</sup> Senator Earle C. Clements and other politicians advocated in Washington for the plant, but the proposition was rejected, apparently because the Army desired to keep the camp land in reserve for use if needed and did not want to establish a precedent

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93 "Breckinridge Has Everything To Offer" (editorial), *Union County Advocate*, 18 February 1954.

94 "Olin Industries May Locate In County," *Union County Advocate*, 18 March 1954; "Olin-Breck Deal Discussed In Washington," *Union County Advocate*, 29 April 1954.

for selling off chunks of the camp land to industry.<sup>95</sup>

Upon the announcement that Olin would be unable to purchase the camp land, the *Advocate*, which had supported the plant as a potential economic bolster for the county, took the opportunity to reflect on the camp's impact on Union County in an editorial which included the statements:

We are not impressed with Army reasons for rejecting the proposal. We are impressed with what seems to us is a total lack of concern on the part of the Army for a community that has both prospered and suffered as a result of Army policy. There is no denying that Camp Breckinridge has filtered millions into the community economy. There is also no denying that Army policy as related to Camp Breckinridge has brought to this community a continuous state of unrest and uncertainty. (...) It has been opened and closed three times. During the activation business is good; during the deactivation business is not good.

The off-again, on-again Army policy creates a situation of instability and uncertainty. (...) The fact that the army might at some time in the future need this acreage is to us no argument for denying the site to an industry that would have given employment to many of our unemployed....

Only one conclusion can be reached as to why the Army said 'no.' It has long been an accepted fact that the Army keeps what it has regardless of other considerations. The Army is an entity of its own. The Army's concept of anything but the Army is both limited and unconcerned.

If this community was asking for all of Breckinridge to be declared surplus, there might be some question about national defense. All that is sought is the never-used 1,500 acres in one corner of the reservation. Just how long must we be the victims of an unreasonable policy that affects the welfare of the entire community?<sup>96</sup>

Others in Union County and surrounding areas who hoped to have Olin locate near Morganfield did not give up easily, and pushed back on both the refusal to sale those 1,500 acres and on the Camp in general. Despite rumblings of attempts to sue the government, it was eventually accepted that nothing could be done to change the verdict

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95 "Army Turns Thumbs Down On Sale Breck Land To Olin," *Union County Advocate*, 10 June 1954.

96 "We Still Suffer As Result Of Army Policy," *Union County Advocate*, 10 June 1954.

on Olin, and the factory did not locate in the area.<sup>97</sup> Some considered the loss of the factory to have been the best outcome for the county, due to the perceived environmental and public safety hazards of an explosives factory.<sup>98</sup>

After the refusal of the Olin proposal and other initiatives to bring industry to the mostly-inactive camp land, organized public agitation grew for something to be done about Camp Breckinridge, which continued to occupy 1/7th of the land in Union County. Farm groups, such as the Union County Farm Bureau, were among the 37 city government units and civic organizations, that presented Senators Earle Clements and Alben Barkley with petitions calling for the camp lands to be liquidated immediately. Local governments were particularly interested because of the lost tax revenue represented by the land. Farm interests stated in their petitions that at least 20,000 acres of the camp land would be well-suited to agriculture, and that production from the land could significantly add to the annual value of farm products produced in the county. The farm petition also touted a potential \$8 million investment in rehabilitating the land for crop production. The petitions also made a case for the development of the minerals under the camp land as a possible avenue for increased employment and economic prosperity in the county. In general, the petitions claimed that “Breckinridge is a great deterrent to the local economy by hampering the agricultural and industrial development of the area.”<sup>99</sup> Despite these efforts and support from Senator Clements, in August 1956,

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97 “No Grounds Found For Suing Army,” *Union County Advocate*, 1 July 1954.

98 “Editorial: Mr. Greathouse May Have Something Here,” *Union County Advocate*, 29 July 1954.

99 “Petitions Seek To Have Army Close Camp Permanently, Sell Land Back to The People,” *The Sturgis News*, 16 February 1956.

the Army Chief of Staff declared that the camp would not be disposed of in the near future.<sup>100</sup>

In 1956, *The Sturgis News* gave its assessment of what would happen when the camp Breckinridge lands were sold:

They say that the income that could come to farmers if they could again convert the property to agriculture would be a big boon to the county. (There might even be oil under that land.) We are inclined to believe that if Breckinridge were sold, it would find itself in the hands of a limited few and the economy not helped as much as some believe... this could be wrong, though.<sup>101</sup>

While the actual sale of the vast majority of the land was a decade away, the *News's* assessment was eerily prescient of what would actually transpire in the mid-1960s.

Some small action was taken on parts of land in Camp Breckinridge in the mid-1950s. In early April 1956, Kurtz-Herron Auction Company announced that one tract of 212.5 acres of surplus land would be sold at public auction on 11 May. This was the first bit of land offered for sale from the camp. The tract had been part of the old W.R. Waller farm, which was originally 300 acres, but was owned by Waller Young when it was acquired for the camp in 1942. The tract fronted on U.S. Highway 60 for roughly  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile and sat about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from the Morganfield city limit. The tract of land had never been used for training soldiers. To reclaim his land, Young paid \$230 per acre for the land, or \$48,875 total, which was \$22,275 more than he had received for the land; it was also missing a large barn that had been present in 1942, and had lost a 10 foot right-of-way on U.S. 60 which had been granted to the state.<sup>102</sup>

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100 "General's Statemens Indicate Breckinridge to Stay," *The Sturgis News*, 16 August 1956.

101 "General's Statemens Indicate Breckinridge to Stay," *The Sturgis News*, 16 August 1956.

102 "212 Acres of Camp Breck To Be Sold," *Union County Advocate*, 12 April 1956; "Breck Acreage



In the early 1960s, serious public discussion including Department of Defense and General Service Administration officials began in regards to the disposal of the camp lands.<sup>103</sup> While the camp lands were declared surplus in February 1962, it was not until August 1962 that official public discussions began in earnest about how long the camp land would continue to remain in government possession.<sup>104</sup> Much as had been the case in the early 1940s during the planning of and land acquisition for the camp, the months following notice that it had been declared surplus were a period of uncertainty and intense speculation about the future of this portion of the Union County landscape.

In late 1963 and early 1964, proposals emerged for interventions into the disposal of the camp lands. In particular, the Union County Farm Bureau and Union County Fiscal Court advocated for the lands to be transferred from the General Services Administration to the Department of Agriculture, so that the Farm Home Administration (FHA) could handle the sale of the land. The reasoning behind this proposal was that many of those interested in purchasing the Camp lands were young farmers who would not be able to financially handle a land purchase without the assistance of the FHA, which assisted farmers who did not have the cash on hand or financial standing to obtain a standard bank loan.<sup>105</sup> Ultimately the land remained in the hands of the GSA until its

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Sale Friday," *Union County Advocate*, 10 May 1956; "Young Pays \$48,875 For Breck Acreage," *Union County Advocate*, 17 May 1956. Years later, it was speculated that a contributing factor to why this property had been declared surplus so much earlier than the rest was that Young was the former mayor of Morganfield. See *Land Grantors in Henderson, Union v. United States*, 64 Fed. Cl. 661, 2005 U.S. Claims LEXIS 89 (1 April 2005), Section I.D..

103 "Officials on 3 Levels Discuss Camp Disposal," *The Sturgis News*, 16 August 1962.

104 "GSA Reveals Breck Disposal Plans," *Union County Advocate*, 11 November 1964; "Officials on 3 Levels Discuss Camp Disposal," *The Sturgis News*, 16 August 1962.

105 "FHA Intervention of Breck Land Disposal Discussed," *Union County Advocate*, 23 January 1964.

sale.

Disposal of the mineral rights caused great controversy, not only over who should reap the financial rewards, but also over who should even be allowed to purchase the rights in their sale. Some local groups supported either selling oil and coal rights with surface rights or providing for a rights to a fraction of oil and coal royalties to be retained by the surface purchaser.<sup>106</sup> Early in 1964, it became public that the Tennessee Valley Authority, an agency of the federal government, had expressed interest in acquiring the rights to mine the coal reserves. By that time, the TVA had become the primary provider of electricity in the area it served in the Upper South, and most of its power was generated by coal-fired power plants.<sup>107</sup> Union County was not part of the TVA service area. Opposition to TVA's acquisition of the coal reserves came from multiple sources. Congressman William Natcher wrote in a letter to the administrator of General Services, "I want to again emphasize my belief and that of my people that holding a large part of the reservation in reserve would not benefit those who reside in this section of Kentucky."<sup>108</sup> The *Advocate* opposed TVA's acquisition of the reserves in an article, stating that "T.V.A. has no business mining coal in this or in any other area." The *Advocate* speculated that TVA did not plan to develop the Breckinridge reserves, but rather to use them "as a threat in negotiating contracts with private mining companies." The *Advocate* described how TVA's ownership of the coal would severely reduce, if not

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106 "Stay Out Of Breck, TVA Urged," *Union County Advocate*, 19 March 1964.

107 See *A History of the Tennessee Valley Authority: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (Knoxville, TN: Tennessee Valley Authority Information Office, 1983). A more in-depth description of the TVA in the 1960s is provided in the next chapter.

108 "Stay Out Of Breck, TVA Urged," *Union County Advocate*, 19 March 1964.

eliminate, the potential tax revenue and payroll that a private company's development of the resource would bring, and called TVA's interest in the camp coal, "another instance of an agency of the federal government attempting to encroach upon the rights of private enterprise and all at the expense of taxpayers." The *Advocate* primarily supported coal rights being sold with surface rights or, if not, surface buyers being guaranteed tonnage royalties.<sup>109</sup>

As the question of whether TVA would be able to acquire the camp coal rights remained open, the National Coal Policy Conference, Inc., composed of the National Coal Association and the United Mine Workers of America, used claims about coal's prior economic impact in the county to argue for why the rights should be sold to private companies rather than TVA. They claimed that coal contributed \$7,652,331 to the Union County economy during 1962, including the industry paying \$4,033,952 in payroll, \$185,153 in state and local taxes, and \$3,434,236 in services and supplies.<sup>110</sup> While the newspaper did not share the methodology behind these numbers, the *Advocate* adopted them in its own opposition to TVA, adding that "Coal mining is an old industry in the county, and over a long period of years it has funneled millions upon millions of dollars into business channels.... Coal and farming are the county's two big businesses. Without either Union County might be classified as a depressed area." The *Advocate* asserted that coal mining's previous economic importance to the county provided additional support for the Breckinridge coal rights going either to the surface buyers or a private company,

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109 "Editorial: TVA Should Stay Out of Breckinridge," *Union County Advocate*, 19 March 1964.

110 "Coal Big Factor In Local Economy," *Union County Advocate*, 23 April 1964.

noting “We can imagine nothing more serious to our future economy than having Tennessee Valley Authority acquire these rights.”<sup>111</sup>

The General Services Administration denied the TVA's request for the coal rights, after which the agency applied to the United States Bureau of the Budget. In October 1964, the Bureau also refused the TVA.<sup>112</sup> The *Advocate* celebrated this decision, calling it “heartening news” for the area and congratulating Congressman Natcher on his efforts to stop TVA's acquisition attempts. The *Advocate* hoped that purchase of the coal rights by a privately-owned company would mean their immediate development, but asserted that even if the only economic impact to be derived from the coal reserves in the immediate future was tax revenue, it would be better than the tax-exempt TVA.<sup>113</sup>

In November 1964, the General Services Administration announced how it would dispose of the camp lands and mineral rights. The minerals would be disposed of first, with coal rights sold separately from oil, gas, and others. Surface areas would go next, divided into “farm-sized parcels,” and sold in waves “to avoid market saturation.” Sale of some of the acreage to government agencies was also being negotiated, including 1,600 acres to the City of Morganfield for industrial use, 8.5 acres to the Kentucky Department of Education, and existing utilities facilities and acres for the development of more by the Henderson-Union REA and the Big Rivers Rural Electric Cooperative. The Commonwealth of Kentucky was also engaged in what would eventually be a successful negotiation with the GSA over the combined transfer and purchase of roughly 5,000 acres

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111 “Coal Big Business In Union County,” *Union County Advocate*, 30 April 1964.

112 “TVA Denied Coal Rights at Breckinridge,” *Union County Advocate*, 8 October 1964.

113 “Good News For The Area,” *Union County Advocate*, 15 October 1964.

of the former camp for wildlife conservation, including the area of the constructed lake.<sup>114</sup>

Within a month after GSA announced its plans, former camp landowners and their heirs had begun to mobilize in an attempt to alter the course of the disposal of the Breckinridge lands. Cyrus Higginson, son of R.L. Higginson, circulated a petition in local banks and rural markets in Union, Henderson, and Webster Counties. The petition implored the GSA to “permit the undersigned to purchase the land taken from them together with all coal and minerals at the same price the Government paid them for the land less the value of improvements removed by the Government.” In January, Higginson mailed the petition to Congressman William Natcher with 346 signatures. The letter accompanying the petition included a statement that “these petitioners feel that they are not being treated fairly as they were promised the opportunity to re-purchase this property when the Government took the land.”<sup>115</sup> As the sale dates approached throughout 1965, notices calling all former camp-area land owners for meetings about their plight dotted the *Union County Advocate* almost weekly.<sup>116</sup> Their efforts had no immediate effect on the progress of the land and mineral rights disposal; their legal battle is detailed later in this chapter.

The GSA set the date for the final sale of large-acreage tracts of mineral rights for 15 April 1965. The GSA opened the camp lands for inspection and accepted sealed bids from December through April; inspections included both geophysical studies and core

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114 “GSA Reveals Breck Disposal Plans,” *Union County Advocate*, 25 November 1964.

115 “Natcher Gets Petition from Former Camp Breck Land Owners,” *The Union County Advocate*, 28 January 1965.

116 e.g. “Land Owners Meet Tonight,” *Union County Advocate*, 25 February 1965.

drilling.<sup>117</sup> By mid-January, the GSA claimed that over 500 companies and individuals had expressed interest in bidding on the camp mineral rights.<sup>118</sup> Major oil companies engaged in core drilling exploration on the lands, including Texaco, Gulf and what was then Socony-Mobil; coal companies also engaged in core drilling.<sup>119</sup> As a result of actions by County Judge Faust Simpson and Congressman Natcher, on 25 March 1965 the GSA added a then-unusual provision in the deeds that were being sold: “the owner of the mineral rights shall be liable to the owner of the surface areas for actual damages caused thereby to the surface, improvements, livestock, or growing crops.” This had not been part of the original plan for the sale of the minerals, and was supposed to provide more protection for surface owners than had been typical in oil and gas leases previously used in Union and surrounding counties.<sup>120</sup>

The value of the land beyond its mineral underlyings was recognized across Kentucky, a *Louisville Courier-Journal* article, reprinted in the *Advocate*, stated that the land was “too attractive to be spoiled by strip-mining, and we hope that the G.S.A. will write into its contracts for sale of mineral rights a provision that none of the great coal deposits lying underneath the land—most of it at depths of 200 feet or more—may be removed by open pit or strip method.”<sup>121</sup> Despite these sentiments, and efforts of local officials and Congressman Natcher, the GSA declared that it was beyond the scope of

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117 “Breck Open To Mineral Folks,” *Union County Advocate*, 7 January 1965.

118 “Over 500 Bids In On Breck Mineral Rights,” *Union County Advocate*, 14 January 1965.

119 “Major Oil Companies Core Drilling At Breck,” *Union County Advocate*, 21 January 1965.,

120 “Breckinridge Land Buyers To Get Damage Protection,” *Union County Advocate*, 1 April 1965

121 “A Sale Beneficial to Kentucky,” *Louisville Courier-Journal* editorial, reprinted in the *Union County Advocate*, 11 November 1964.

their duties in disposing of surplus property. The GSA had also consulted with coal industry representatives and the Kentucky Commissioner of Mines and Minerals, who advised that the coal seams around the camp were too deep to be strip mined anyway.<sup>122</sup>

Despite having earlier been refused, at the conclusion of the bid submission period, the TVA was the big winner of the coal rights, outbidding the second-highest bidder, a subsidiary of Peabody, by \$5.75 million. TVA's bid was \$7.4 million on the rights to 26,660 acres. Island Creek Coal Company, which was already developing a strong presence in Union County, was the fourth-highest bidder at three-quarter million dollars. TVA's bid amounted to \$270 an acre, which was said to be, up to that time, the highest-ever amount paid for a substantial acreage of coal rights in Kentucky's Western Coalfields region. Two tracts of the eight offered for sale, at 3,930 and 190 acres, received no bids, and another small tract was purchased by the oil company holding a lease on it. The camp bid represented the fourth largest tract of coal rights ever purchased by TVA.<sup>123</sup> Texaco was the high bidder for the oil rights, securing two tracts covering 9,300 acres for \$14.7 million. Other large tracts were secured by other companies in Delaware, Oklahoma, and Texas. Though the GSA waited until July to make the final announcement, it did ultimately accept all of the high bids.<sup>124</sup>

At the time of TVA's bid and purchase of the coal rights, it was widely believed that they would simply hold them and not develop the mines, as they already possessed

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122 "Can't Include 'No Strip Mining Clause In Sale Breckinridge Mineral Rights," *Union County Advocate*, 24 December 1964.

123 "TVA Coal Bids \$5.7 Million High," *Union County Advocate*, 22 April 1965.

124 "General Services Administration Accepts Breck Bids For Oil Rights," *Union County Advocate*, 8 July 1965.

more than enough coal reserves for their needs in what was then the foreseeable future. This prediction proved untrue, as TVA's tapping of Union County coal came much sooner than expected. Their development of the camp's coal resources initiated yet another period of drastic landscape change in the area, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

As the mineral sale was in progress, plans were also moving forward for the disposal of camp lands, and various groups and agencies angled for shares of the acres. In addition to the public agencies mentioned earlier, whose requests were factored into sale plans from the beginning, other groups also made requests. The Highland Creek Watershed Conservancy District, a group of farmers joined in the name of conservation interests and working in collaboration with the United States Department of Agriculture and Soil Conservation Service, sought land rights and to construct flood retaining structures in the camp area. The Highland Creek Conservancy District's \$2.3 million water and flood control project sought to manage 70,000 acres of land in Henderson and Union counties, improving its cropability. In 1964, the District had sought assistance from the USDA and SCS in gaining easements in the camp area from GSA, totaling roughly 2,000 acres. The GSA had denied their request with the claim that such an act could slow the entire process of disposing of the camp lands.<sup>125</sup> The GSA also stated that surface conditions were important to potential purchasers of the mineral rights, and the district's plans to have portions of the easement lands flooded occasionally could “change the geography of the surface previously clear of water” and impact the desirability of the

<sup>125</sup> “GSA Reveals Breck Disposal Plans,” *Union County Advocate*, 11 Nov 1964.



lands for those hoping to mine or drill from them.<sup>126</sup> The district continued its efforts through 1965, but was once again denied.<sup>127</sup> By denying this request, the GSA blatantly prioritized gaining high prices for the mineral rights under camp land over the collective benefit of the landowners, including farmers and other residents, of 70,000 acres. Even before mining and drilling operations began on the camp land, these processes were affecting the agricultural landscape of the the area. But here there were two competing visions of the landscape—one involved reconfiguring the land to control water and benefit agriculture (and roadways), the other involved reconfiguring the land for oil and mineral extraction. Both were potentially radical reconstructions of a landscape already altered by both farming and camp operations.

With plans little affected by pre-camp landowners and interest groups, in late Summer 1965, after it had finalized the disposal of the minerals, the GSA announced that it would sell 3,900 acres of the camp land at auction on 30 September. Ten parcels for sale ranged in size from 195 acres to 570 acres of unimproved land, and there was one additional 46 acre parcel of improved land with a house on it, which was still known as “the old Cottingham property,” after the family who had owned it before the camp.<sup>128</sup> Advertisements for the sale promoted the land as “rich” and “ideal for agricultural & pasture use.”<sup>129</sup> At the time, it was described as “the largest land sale in the history of

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126 “Highland Creek Denied Easements,” 21 January 1965.

127 “Corporation May Be Formed To Buy Breckinridge Acreage,” *Union County Advocate*, 3 February 1966. By the late 1990s, many of the desired Highland Creek watershed improvements had been implemented. Their implementation was more piecemeal than the Conservancy District had envisioned in the 1960s.

128 “GSA To Sell 3,900 Acres At Breck,” *Union County Advocate*, 26 August 1965.

129 Advertisement, *Union County Advocate*, 26 August 1965.

Union County and perhaps in Western Kentucky.”<sup>130</sup> Over 350 people attended the auction, but the outcome of this first land sale was not as dramatic as it might have been, as two of the purchasers, Mark Greenwell and John Royster, buyers of 956 and 195.5 acres of land, respectively, had already been farming under government leases on most of the land they acquired.<sup>131</sup> Greenwell and Royster were Union County residents, as were all but two of the successful bidders, Donald Anderson, president of a trucking company in Evansville, Indiana, who purchased 1,109 acres, and Marion Prince of Henderson, who purchased 570 acres. The auction brought \$1,063,500 total for the 3,900 acres, which averaged is \$273 per acre.<sup>132</sup>

As part of the sale arrangements, titles to the land were not scheduled to be turned over by the GSA until January 1966.<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, the new landowners went to work immediately after the auction preparing their lands for farming. By late November, Greenwell had pushed out fence rows, and Prince's farm manager had had overgrown areas cleared and a new drainage ditch surveyed and was receiving bids for its construction.<sup>134</sup> The camp land had not only been affected by the military training activity that occurred, but also by two decades without farmer-ownership. While, as in the case of Greenwell and Royster, much of the acreage had been rented to farmers for several years, there had not been the certainty of return on investment of major improvements to the land that comes with ownership. Much of the land that had not been

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130 “Interest High In Land Sale,” *Union County Advocate*, 30 October 1965.

131 Photo captions, *Union County Advocate*, 7 October 1965.

132 “Breck Land Sales for \$1,063,500,” *Union County Advocate*, 7 October 1965.

133 “Breck Land Sales for \$1,063,500,” *Union County Advocate*, 7 October 1965.

134 “New Breck Landowners Are Making Improvements,” *Union County Advocate*, 24 November 1965.

leased to farmers had grown over and through lack of maintenance become unsuitable for cropping and livestock pasture until significant improvements were made by the new owners.

In January 1966, Congressman Natcher announced that 22,300 acres of the camp land would be sold at auction on 1 March 1966, in over 30 tracts ranging from 82 to 1,460 acres.<sup>135</sup> Of these acres, 10,565 were in the impact area. Three tracts totaling 1,262 acres were withdrawn before the sale, though the GSA did not provide a reason at the time.<sup>136</sup> As had been done for the 30 September 1965 auction, the GSA hired local realtor and auctioneer George Kurtz to conduct the 1 March auction. Newspaper advertisements for the sale touted “rich land” that was “ideal for agricultural and pasture use.”<sup>137</sup> While 82 acres was not far from the size of many pre-camp farms, this tract was an anomaly in the sale. Of the 35 tracts sold, only three were under 350 acres (an 82, a 97, and a 237 acre tract). Of the remaining 32 tracts, 19 were over 600 acres.<sup>138</sup> In the February 1942 take of roughly 10,000 acres for the camp, the land had been divided over 99 separate tracts, almost all of which were under 200 acres, with roughly half of those under 100 acres.<sup>139</sup> The April 1942 take of roughly 19,600 acres for the camp involved roughly 300 tracts, placing the average tract size at around 65 acres.<sup>140</sup> For most of the pre-camp landowners and their descendants, the new geography created by the division of land for

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135 “Breck Land Sale Date March 1,” *Union County Advocate*, 20 January 1966.

136 “3 Breck Tracts Withdrawn From Land Sale March 1,” *Union County Advocate*, 27 January 1966.

137 Advertisement, *Union County Advocate*, 20 January 1966.

138 “22,300 Breck Acres Sell for \$4,630,000,” *Union County Advocate*, 3 March 1966.

139 “Many Fine Farms In First Section Big Camp Project,” *Union County Advocate*, 12 February 1942.

140 “Suit Filed To Acquire 19,595 More Acres,” *Union County Advocate*, 2 April 1942.

the camp sale precluded their repurchasing their family's original land at the 1966 auction. The land was both divided into tracts that did not align with the pre-camp farms, and was amassed into tracts far larger than those originally taken, so that substantial financial resources, far exceeding payments made for the land in the 1940s, were required to bid on them.

Over 600 people attended what was declared “the largest sale of real estate ever held in Western Kentucky.” Though an observer of the sale has noted that at least one prominent area businessman and farmer went to the auction with enough cashiers checks on hand to buy all of the acreage, no one made a serious attempt at such a purchase. The largest purchasers of the land in both acres and dollars spent were the Bickett Brothers from nearby Daviess County, who bought 3,239 acres in 5 tracts for \$539,000. The Moloneys of Ridgeway, Illinois, bought 1,505 acres in 3 tracts for \$438,000, and Bob and Joe Sprague of Sturgis bought 973 acres for \$400,000. Other big spenders on auction day included W.J. Rhea of Clay in Webster County, who spent \$346,000 for two tracts totally 1,079 acres, and Billy Don, Thomas, and Bernard Greenwell of Uniontown, who bought 601 acres for \$230,000. Other large acreage purchasers included Irvin Hagerdorn of St. Meinrad, Indiana, who purchased 1,460 acres for \$196,000, and Clyde Reed of Lake City, Kentucky, who purchased 1,703 acres for \$191,000. The highest per acre price paid was \$412 per acre, and the lowest was \$102. The 22,300 acres sold for a total of \$4,630,000, an average of \$208 per acre. The \$65 lower average price per acre than the land sold in September 1965 was attributed both to half the acres having been in the

impact area, and some of the other acres being of lower quality than those sold earlier.<sup>141</sup>

As after the September sale, those who purchased the lands in March immediately went to work preparing them for agricultural use. They worked “at full blast” to clear tracts and prepare the land for corn planting in the 1966 season, the time for which was rapidly approaching. Even after the auction of the camp lands and acceptance of the bids, however, the GSA still inserted itself into their use. On 21 March, the GSA ordered all farming operations on the lands purchased in both sales to stop, in the name of red tape. The GSA prohibited farmers from further work on their new fields until the landowners received their orders of possession, which the GSA itself had to mail out, and upon receipt, paid the federal government for liability insurance. As the the *Advocate* mildly described, landowners were “not happy over the GSA stop order,” as conditions were ideal at the time for land preparation that had be completed quickly in order to get a crop out for the year.<sup>142</sup> Fortunately, the farmers had “won the Battle of Red Tape” by the end of March and were able to resume their activities. As county Soil Conservationist Roy Graff phrased it, they were “rapidly converting the former military reservation into a food for peace factory,” through such efforts as removing 25 years of unfettered vegetation growth and installing new drainage systems. Much of the land was ideally suited to corn growth, and those less ideal acres could be brought into high production capability with

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141 “22,300 Breck Acres Sell for \$4,630,000,” *Union County Advocate*, 3 March 1966. University of Kentucky Agricultural Extension Agent Rankin Powell recalls that businessman and quarry operator Clyde Reed of Lake City, KY, had been financially prepared to purchase the entire 22,300 acres. Reed had consulted with Powell about the purchase of all the land before the sale, but decided only to bid on and purchase two tracts on the day of the auction.

142 “GSA Halts All Farming At Breck,” *Union County Advocate*, 24 March 1966.

careful management and conservation cropping. At worst, the land was well-suited for hay and pasture.<sup>143</sup> Not quite all of those who had purchased the land immediately plowed into farming operations on it; within one month of the sale, four tracts had already been resold to new owners.<sup>144</sup>

Efforts to secure ownership of land in the former camp area by the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources for a wildlife management area finally succeeded in Summer 1968. Fish and Wildlife had already controlled the management of the land south of Highway 56 for five years, and paid the state \$158,450 for 4,500 acres, which was half of the appraised value of the land, and did not include the mineral or oil rights. The General Services Administration gifted the state an additional 900 acres, with the stipulation that it would be used only for wildlife conservation, or ownership would return to the federal government. The land included three lakes, Mauzy, Morton, and Sulphur Springs; Mauzy was the lake constructed as part of the Camp facilities, which had originally been named Des Islets. Prior to the camp, the land that went into what was named the Higginson-Henry Wildlife Management Area had originally been 136 privately owned tracts.<sup>145</sup> While some local people, particularly those of the Union County Fish and Game Club, supported the creation of the conservation area, others thought it was not the best use of land with such capacity for high agricultural productivity.<sup>146</sup>

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143 Roy Graff, "Farmers Resume Breck Activities," *Union County Advocate*, 31 March 1966.

144 "Breck Acreage Changes Hands," *Union County Advocate*, 31 March 1966.

145 "State Wildlife Gets Title To 5,400 Acres In Breckinridge Area," *Union County Advocate*, 4 July 1968.

146 C.D. Henry and George Higginson had been active in the Union County Fish and Game Club and advocates for the creation of the wildlife conservation area on the former Camp land. They died while

Sales of small parcels of land, buildings, and other incidentals of the camp continued through the late 1960s, but with the mineral and land sales of 1965 and 1966 and the establishment of the wildlife management area, the new geography of the camp section of the Union County landscape had been established. The new overlays of land and mineral rights ownership set the stage for major changes to and growth in the hybrid energy landscape of corn and coal production in the county over the next several decades. In the background of these developments were the ongoing efforts of the families who had owned the land before it became Camp Breckinridge to obtain a share of the prosperity that was being generated from their former holdings.

### ***Decades of litigation***

Legal proceedings relating to the acquisition of land for Camp Breckinridge began just after lands were condemned in Spring 1942 and extended to 2009, with the possibility of being reactivated at any time. Because they form a narrative of their own, and yet another layer in the complex overlay of the power struggles on the Union County landscape, they are aggregated here. Those who began the litigation process by fighting the appraisals of their condemned land were attempting to get fair compensation for the loss of the ground that they had been economically, physically, and emotionally tied to, in

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negotiations for the WMA were in progress. C.W. Mauzy had been a conservation officer in the area for years. The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife agreed to name the area after these three men, and the suggestion of the Union County Club ("Recreation Area Names Will Honor Three Men," *Union County Advocate*, 20 January 1966). County Agricultural Agent Powell relayed the public dismay at the creation of a wildlife reserve out of such productive agricultural land; he views this dismay as ongoing to the present time.

many cases to meet very pressing needs related to the forced rearrangement of their lives. Fewer than a handful of the original owners were still alive for the proceedings in the 2000s, but their heirs continued to fight, both for the justice owed to their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, and for the additional value of the land in terms of coal and oil that had not been accounted for to their ancestors at all.

In May 1942, following the actions of landowners to protest the low appraisals of their farms, Judge Mac Swinford declared that there would be a special District Court session beginning 13 July 1942, in Owensboro to hear cases involving 12,000 acres of land in the Camp Breckinridge area. The special session would also hear cases involving 800 acres of land in Henderson being used for construction of a war-effort factory.<sup>147</sup> Despite the Union County cases not coming up in the first week of the July special session of court, hopes of increasing appraisals through litigation were bolstered on 18 July 1942. Five Henderson County landowners had sued over appraisals of 765 acres taken by the War Department as part of the Ohio River Ordnance Plant, which processed ammonia. The total of judgements awarded landowners was \$41,062 over the original appraisals, almost doubling those values. Fluornoy, who advocated for swift resolution to the camp suits, co-represented one of the largest landowners in this ammonia plant case. Sun Oil Company and Kentucky Natural Gas, holders of oil leases on some of the 765 acres, were also involved in the suits.<sup>148</sup> Other attempts around the region to contest values of defense area lands had met with mixed results. In Burns City, Indiana, 27

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147 "Special Session for Land Cases," *Union County Advocate*, 14 May 1942.

148 "Henderson Suits Spur Hopes Of County Property Owners," *Union County Advocate*, 23 July 1942.



individuals sued over the appraisals of their land and received a 50% per acre increase. Elsewhere in Kentucky, at the Wolfe Creek Dam, 10 landowners filed suit, with 9 reductions and only 1 increase in original appraisals resulting.<sup>149</sup>

The actual court dates of the condemnation and reappraisal suits stretched for months and years after the affected families had to leave their lands, with hearing dates from October 1942 through January 1947.<sup>150</sup> Some, particularly those who did not have the resources to mount a significant legal battle, saw no adjustments to their appraisals. Others fared better. Dr. W.H. Puryear, for example, saw the appraisal of land that had been taken in Union County, some of which had been in his family since 1869, raised from \$22,500 to \$30,000 for 306 acres. He also owned land in Henderson County, for which the value was raised from \$14,500 to \$19,500 for 207 acres, though this was still significantly less than he had documentation of having invested in the purchase and improvement of this land.<sup>151</sup>

In the case of R.L. and Zelma Higginson, Ruby Higginson's parents, they were involved in multiple suits. The first was settled in District Court in 1942, and resulted in a token increase on the low valuation of 19.5 acres of land. In part because of the good fortune of an oil discovery on the farm in Webster County they purchased after being forced to leave their Camp land, the Higginsons had the resources to hire a legal team for their later condemnation suit, and they still viewed increased appraisal of their condemned land as essential for their financial survival. Their trial was held in District

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149 "30% Land Owners Accept U.S. Appraisals," *Union County Advocate*, 23 April 1942.

150 Higginson, *Land*, 27.

151 Higginson, *Land*, 39-46.

Court in Owensboro in September 1944, and lawyers asked for increased valuation of the land from \$71 per acre to \$200 per acre; the court ultimately awarded an increase to \$83.64 per acre, or around \$10,000 total, which was the amount that Higginson had agreed to pay his lawyers. Though the lawyers reduced their fees by half, the reappraisal ultimately provided very little in either financial or emotional restitution. According to Higginson, the mood of the court was decidedly against her family in the trial, with the Judge periodically making comments which implied that the farmers seeking higher appraisals for their land were un-American and impeding the war effort by taking their cases to court. While R.L. Higginson wanted to appeal the court's decision, his lawyers advised him against it because of this perception of the prevailing attitude in the courts at the time.<sup>152</sup>

Though the GSA sold the Camp Breckinridge mineral rights and most of the land in 1965 and 1966, the pre-camp landowners and their descendants did not stop their fight for restitution. In particular, Cyrus Higginson, son of R.L. Higginson and brother to Ruby, took up his father's efforts when the sale of the camp land was announced. On 15 April 1965, he filed a class action suit against the United States of America at the U.S. District Court in Owensboro, on behalf of the roughly 1,500 landowners, himself included, affected by the camp land acquisitions. The suit argued that the plaintiffs were entitled to the right to buy back the land, rental fees for its use since its military use ceased, and payment for mineral rights, on the grounds of the Surplus Property Act of 1944, the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution, and statements made by government

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<sup>152</sup> Higginson, *Land*, 49.

agents at the time of the acquisition in 1942. The attorney for the U.S. government filed a motion to dismiss the suit, asserting that there was no claim on which relief could be granted. District Judge Henry Brooks upheld this motion and ordered the suit dismissed in August 1965.<sup>153</sup> Higginson's complaint was amended several times, but the attempt to gain a new trial was refused by the District Court, so appeals to higher courts followed.<sup>154</sup>

The United States District Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit recorded its decision in the Higginson case on 28 September 1967. It confirmed the lower court's decision to dismiss the case, on the grounds that the government had acquired the land fee simple—save easements for public utilities, railroads, and pipelines—that is, it had acquired absolute ownership of the land, with the right to do with it as it wished and no obligation to the previous owners. The Court of Appeals also stated that since the Surplus Property Act of 1944 had been repealed by Section 502 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, 13 years prior to the camp being declared surplus and 16 prior to the bringing of the suit, that it could not apply to the case. Furthermore, the court stated that it did not matter what use the land had ultimately come to, and the validity of the title of ownership acquired under condemnation was determined only by the use the land was put to at the time it was taken.<sup>155</sup>

In October 1967, Higginson petitioned for the case to be heard in the U.S.

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<sup>153</sup> Higginson, *Land*, 83.

<sup>154</sup> Cyrus Higginson, On Behalf of Himself and All Other Former Landowners, or Heirs, Successors, and Assigns Thereof, of Thirty Six Thousand Acres, Namely Camp Breckenridge, in Union, Henderson, and Webster Counties, Kentucky, Plaintiff-Appellant, v. The United States of America, Defendant-Appellee, No. 16926, 1967 U.S. App. LEXIS 5011 (Sixth Circuit, September 28, 1967).

<sup>155</sup> Higginson v. United States.

Supreme Court. The Commonwealth of Kentucky submitted an amicus brief requesting that the Supreme Court hear the appeal and ultimately provide relief to the pre-camp landowners. On 4 March 1968, the Supreme Court denied the request to hear the case, and in response the Higginson lawyers petitioned that the court reconsider and either hear the case or send it back to District Court due to technical errors in the handling of the case at that level that had occurred. The Supreme Court ultimately refused to overturn the lower court's ruling that spring.<sup>156</sup>

The Higginson family continued to fight. After several years of research into the Camp land acquisitions and subsequent litigation, in March 1978, Ruby Higginson, who by that time resided in Prospect KY, northeast of Louisville, spearheaded the reassembly of a group seeking to gain compensation for the landowners or their heirs.<sup>157</sup> At their initial meeting on 10 March 1978, at the Henderson County Court House, about 50 landowners voted unanimously to officially reestablish the Breckinridge Land Committee (BLC).<sup>158</sup> The BLC quickly obtained the support of the *Advocate*, which not only religiously posted notices of and reviews of their meetings, but also supportive editorials. An *Advocate* editorial in May 1978, published a few days after the BLC held its third monthly meeting, asserted: “As matters now stand the Breckinridge land acquisition represents the biggest steal by the federals since the Indians were ejected from their

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156 Writ of certiorari denied *Higginson v. United States*, 390 U.S. 947, 88 S. Ct. 1034, 19 L. Ed. 2d 1137, 1968 U.S. LEXIS 2343 (1968) ; Rehearing denied by *Higginson v. United States*, 391 U.S. 961, 88 S. Ct. 1834, 20 L. Ed. 2d 875, 1968 U.S. LEXIS 1627 (1968)

157 Tyler Mumford, “Fighting back: Uncle may feel effect of new Breck attempt,” *Union County Advocate*, 1 March 1978.

158 “Breck group to pursue land campaign,” *Union County Advocate*, 15 March 1978.

properties in the west.”<sup>159</sup>

As the BLC worked through what course of action to pursue, individuals both indirectly and directly working for their cause met with resistance when requesting documents from the government about the camp lands. For example, Congressman Carroll Hubbard, when he requested “copies of any and all correspondence and documents of the General Services Administration relating to the disposition of acquisitions of Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky,” received the reply that the files were “voluminous” and would need to be inspected at the GSA's Office of Real Property in Washington DC<sup>160</sup> To directly assist in their research efforts, the BLC employed the Kentucky Rivers Coalition, a non-profit focused on landowners' rights in cases of condemnation, to conduct the research for the Committee's presentations to Kentucky's Congressional representative and other government officials.<sup>161</sup> The KRC representative, Kevin Murphy, submitted Freedom of Information Act requests for documents in October 1978 and traveled to Washington DC in November to examine them. While he did not find in the documents what he called a “smoking gun,” indicating on paper that landowners had been promised they would be able to repurchase their land, he also noted that he was informed by the GSA Chief of Real Estate that “all records and documents

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159 “Editorial: The biggest steal,” *Union County Advocate*, 24 May 1978. It is unclear whether this hyperbolic statement by the *Advocate* refers to Native American land dispossession in general, or specifically to the case of Native Americans disposed for their land for the creation of national parks, which would at least approach a more reasonable comparison. See Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

160 *Land Grantors in Henderson, Union, and Webster Counties, Kentucky, and Their Heirs v. United States*, 69 Fed. Cl. 435, 2005 U.S. Claims LEXIS 382 (2005).

161 “Breck land group meets,” *Union County Advocate*, 22 November 1978.

dealing with negotiations in acquiring properties for Camp Breckinridge have long since been discarded.” He subsequently received “run around” responses about the location of possible documents, and in some cases did not receive any response at all when he inquired directly at the referred locations.<sup>162</sup>

In December 1978, Murphy expressed concern that the roughly 45 people regularly attending each of the first several months of BLC meetings were not enough to gain the attention in Washington that the group desired.<sup>163</sup> As the BLC solicited more membership, they also collected scores of affidavits documenting injustices committed against the former landowners by the government. They also recorded interviews with individuals such as J.S. Towles, who served as a government negotiator at the time of the original land acquisitions, in which he said, “We were led to believe by our superiors, that if this land ever got back on the market the original landowners would have the chance to buy it back.”<sup>164</sup>

The BLC sought to have legislation passed that would grant the pre-Camp landowners and their heirs some or all of the profit that was made by the government by the sale of the mineral rights and the land. In February 1979, while the group as a whole had not traveled to Washington to confront lawmakers, they had been represented there by A.G. Pritchett, Henderson County Judge Executive, and by Sam McElroy, a resident of Morganfield with political ties. Pritchett and McElroy had approached Senators Wendell Ford and Dee Huddleston and gained promises of support from them. McElroy

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162 Land Grantors v. United States, 69 Fed. Cl. 435, 2005 U.S. Claims LEXIS 382 (2005).

163 “Breck land group seeking more help,” *Union County Advocate*, 20 December 1978.

164 “Land group on way to Washington,” *Union County Advocate*, 24 January 1979.

recommended that the BLC avoid traveling to Washington *en masse*, as had recently been done by the tractorcade of farmers involved in the American Agricultural Movement, noting that government officials had become desensitized to such groups due to their frequent appearances.<sup>165</sup>

By late March, the group had over 75 affidavits.<sup>166</sup> In June 1979, Ruby Higginson and a few other members of the BLC traveled to Washington, where they met with Senators Ford and Huddleston and Representative Carroll Hubbard. The politicians agreed to sponsor legislation for the compensation of pre-camp landowners and their heirs for land and mineral rights and assigned their staff members the task of researching and preparing a “private release bill” for the House and the Senate.<sup>167</sup> In addition to the houses of Congress, such a bill would also have to pass through several other government entities, including the General Services Administration, which had not been particularly sympathetic to pre-camp landowners claims in the past. A month after agreeing to try to help the BLC, the Senators, while supportive, were not terribly optimistic. The letter from Ford and Huddleston stated:

As you must realize all too clearly, this will be a very difficult proposition. From the beginning, you and the committee should be aware of the very real chance of failure even if all of us give our best efforts. The type and amount of relief are unprecedented.<sup>168</sup>

Despite the Senators' gentle warning, the BLC persisted in its efforts, both to find and involve more former landowners and their heirs, and to push members of Kentucky's

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165 “Land group gets senators [sic] support,” *Union County Advocate*, 21 February 1979.

166 “Land groups [sic] final report expected next week,” *Union County Advocate*, 21 March 1979.

167 “Congressmen agree to sponsor BLC legislation,” *Union County Advocate*, 13 June 1979.

168 “BLC to get out of politics and into court,” *Union County Advocate*, 25 July 1979.

Congressional delegation to take the actions they had promised. By October 1979, the BLC had assembled a list of 880 people who could have claims to compensation in the land case, including 150 of the original landowners.<sup>169</sup> In late November 1979, the *Advocate* stated “Alleluia, it's finally happened!” after Senators Ford and Huddleston introduced both a private relief bill (Senate Bill 2050) and a resolution (Senate Resolution 287) to have the case heard in the federal Court of Claims. Their resolution was then sent to the Senate Judiciary Committee. In such a case, if voted out of Committee, the full Senate then votes on whether to initiate Court of Claims action,<sup>170</sup> In the Court of Claims process, a trial commissioner reviews presented evidence, determines if the claim is reasonable, sets what (if any) amount the government owes, then sends the recommendation on to Congress for final determination. In this case, a hearing could have been held in Washington DC, Morganfield, or Henderson.<sup>171</sup>

In the Senators' proposal, they requested that the landowners and their heirs be granted \$32 million in compensation. Some of the BLC members, including Higginson, were not happy with this number, which they felt only addressed the actual monetary gain that was made through the sale of the mineral rights in 1965. Higginson stated, emphatically, “I'm not going to be happy with my part of the \$32 million, no sirree.” An

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169 “Action expected soon on land case,” *Union County Advocate*, 24 October 1979.

170 “BLC case introduced to U.S. Senate,” *Union County Advocate*, 28 November 1979; A bill for the relief of the grantors of certain land in Henderson, Union, and Webster Counties, Kentucky, to the United States, and their heirs, S. 2050, 96th Cong. (1979); A resolution to refer the bill (S. 2050) entitled “A bill for the relief of the grantors of certain land in Henderson, Union, and Webster Counties, Kentucky, to the United States, and their heirs” to the Chief Commissioner of the United States Court of Claims for a report thereon, S. Res. 287, 96th Cong. (1979).

171 “BLC to get out of politics and into court,” *Union County Advocate*, 25 July 1979; “BLC case due soon,” *Union County Advocate*, 26 September 1979.



alternate plan, supported by Higginson and others in the BLC, called for not only profits from the sale of the land and mineral rights, but also royalties on each barrel of oil and each ton of coal extracted from the land. Pritchett was doubtful that the BLC would be successful in arguing for royalties, as he understood that the government itself was not getting any substantial royalty payments.<sup>172</sup>

The BLC's case was significantly delayed in being heard by the Senate Judiciary Committee both because the committee's chair, Ted Kennedy, who had the authority to put it on the docket himself, was out campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination, and because there was pressure on the committee not to bring it up until the Army Corps of Engineers had finished assembling their counter-case.<sup>173</sup> No action was taken before the last session of Congress ended in 1980. In mid-March 1980, Kentucky State Representative David Boswell and State Senator Bill Sullivan introduced a resolution to the Kentucky General Assembly urging President Jimmy Carter to support the compensation bill. The resolution passed both houses of the Commonwealth's government, but did not help in getting the bill brought up that session.<sup>174</sup> Senators Ford and Huddleston reintroduced both the private relief bill (as Senate Bill 1227) and the resolution (as Senate Resolution 142) in May 1981. Again the attempted legislation was not brought up for discussion in the the Judiciary Committee before the end of the session.<sup>175</sup> The Senators reintroduced the legislation again in April 1983 in the 98<sup>th</sup>

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172 "BLC takes issue with proposed payment, feels government 'downplayed' importance on coal and oil deposits," *Union County Advocate*, 27 December 1979.

173 "BLC may write more letters," *Union County Advocate*, 25 June 1980.

174 "BLC celebrate [sic] second birthday," *Union County Advocate*, 26 March 1980.

175 "Surprise! BLC compensation bill re-introduced," *Union County Advocate*, 27 May 1981; A bill for

Congress, but again it failed to be heard in committee.<sup>176</sup> Wendell Ford tried again in early 1989 in the 101<sup>st</sup> Congress (Huddleston had left the Senate by this time), with Senate Bill 423; again the bill was referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee, and then to the Subcommittee on Courts and Administrative Practice, where it again was not acted upon.<sup>177</sup>

During the 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress, in 1993, Senator Ford again brought the issue of financial compensation for the former Camp Breckinridge before the Senate. In this iteration of the legislation, Ford presented the relief bill (Senate Bill 794), and a resolution (Senate Resolution 98) that the bill be referred to the Chief Judge of the United States Claims Court for a report on what amount, if any, might be due the former landowners, either legally or equitably. The resolution passed to the Senate Judiciary Committee, which agreed to it in September 1993.<sup>178</sup> The same bill and resolution were re-introduced in November 1994, and the resolution was referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee, but no action was taken on it.<sup>179</sup>

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the relief of the grantors of certain land in Henderson, Union, and Webster Counties, Kentucky, to the United States, and their heirs, S. 1227, 97th Cong. (1981); A resolution to refer the bill (S. 1227) entitled "A bill for the relief of the grantors of certain land in Henderson, Union, and Webster Counties, Kentucky, to the United States, and their heirs" to the Chief Commissioner of the United States Court of Claims for a report thereon, S. Res. 142, 97<sup>th</sup> Cong. (1981).

176 A bill for the relief of the grantors of certain land in Henderson, Union, and Webster Counties, Kentucky, to the United States, and their heirs, S. 1104, 98th Cong. (1983); A resolution to refer the bill (S. 1104) entitled "A bill for the relief of the grantors of certain land in Henderson, Union, and Webster Counties, Kentucky, to the United States, and their heirs" to the Chief Commissioner of the United States Court of Claims for a report thereon, S. Res. 117, 98<sup>th</sup> Cong. (1983).

177 A bill for the relief of land grantors in Henderson, Union, and Webster Counties, Kentucky, and their heirs, S. 423, 101st Congress (1989).

178 A bill for the relief of land grantors in Henderson, Union, and Webster Counties, Kentucky, and their heirs, S. 794, 103rd Congress (1993); A resolution to refer S. 794 entitled, "A bill for the relief of land grantors in Henderson, Union and Webster counties, Kentucky, and their heirs," to the Chief Judge of the United States Claims Court for a report thereon, S. Res. 98, 103rd Cong. (1993).

179 A bill for the relief of land grantors in Henderson, Union, and Webster Counties, Kentucky, and their

The 1993 resolution (Senate Resolution 98) and accompanying bill eventually did result in court proceedings, though the case dragged on for well over a decade before the first full ruling was made. In January 1994, as a result of Bill 794 and Resolution 98, a complaint was filed in the United States Court of Federal Claims. The Chief Judge assigned another of the Court's judges to act as the Hearing Officer. The Complaint had eight counts, six of which asserted violation of the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution. Through 1994 and 1995, the case was enmeshed in procedural technicalities, documentation requests, and further notifications and deposition-takings of those involved. The court delayed further proceedings in 1996 and the bulk of 1997, waiting for the outcome of a Supreme Court case thought to be relevant. Technicalities again dominated the court actions on the case through 1998 and 1999, though, as would later become significant, in November 1998 the Court rejected and had withdrawn from the record documentation from the plaintiffs that addressed who among the former landowners was included within the scope of the legislation that had been referred from Congress. In 2000, the court and the plaintiffs were consumed with working out details about what pre-camp property owners were actually represented in the case, and distinctions in the case between those who had sold their property with and without condemnation proceedings. In 2001 and 2002, the plaintiffs reported that they were engaged in ongoing settlement discussions with the government, though the court found that the government counsel did not work on the case for most of 2001. For the first half

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heirs, S. 2563, 103<sup>rd</sup> Cong. (1994); A resolution to refer S. 2563 entitled, "A bill for the relief of land grantors in Henderson, Union and Webster counties, Kentucky, and their heirs," to the Chief Judge of the United States Claims Court for a report thereon, S.Res 286, 103<sup>rd</sup> Cong. (1994).

of 2003, the court took no action on the case.<sup>180</sup>

A new judge, Susan Braden, took office in Summer 2003 and was assigned to take over as Hearing Officer for the case; observing the excessively long time that the case had remained unresolved, she sought to achieve a quick resolution. Soon after she took office, the plaintiffs filed a report in September, that the November 1998 order of the hearing officer at the time had drastically limited the number of pre-camp landowners eligible to be part of the case, and that in fact only 16% of the acres taken for the camp were at that point part of the case. In conferences over the case in Fall 2003, the government's lawyers indicated that attempts at settlement were going well, though Judge Braden's indicated that she felt this may just have been because the government was not prepared for a trial, since the government had not yet brought in a real estate expert, requested documents from elderly heirs of landowners, retained a research historian, and hired an expert in analyzing historical aerial photographs (all of which would be done in 2004). In attempt to prevent further stalling, Judge Braden declared that if no settlement was reached by the end of 2003, the court would set a trial date. By February 2004, a settlement still had not been reached, and at a 20 February conference on the status of the case, Judge Braden expressed her frustration regarding the case's having been pending for over a decade, and conveyed her suspicion that the plaintiffs had been "sandbagged" into completing some of the technical, time-consuming endeavors, such as precisely straightening out heirs of the original landowners. Counsel for the government denied

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180 This process is detailed in Section II "Procedural History" of *Land Grantors in Henderson, Union v. United States*, 64 Fed. Cl. 661, 2005 U.S. Claims LEXIS 89 (1 April 2005).

any sandbagging, asserting that the delay occurred since the government had needed to determine “how to reasonably approach this difficult issue because this is a unique situation.” At the 20 February meeting, the government's counsel also asserted that the camp lands had been appraised based on their “having the highest and best use as agricultural, residential farmland,” and that payments went to all third party holders of oil and gas leases and not the landowners, because the purpose of those payments was to pay off the leases, essentially saying that the claims about lost value of the oil and mineral rights were invalid.<sup>181</sup>

A few days later, on 24 February 2004, the plaintiffs' counsel asked for a trial date, since the government had not committed to any settlement figures. The trial was eventually set for 8-14 September 2004 in Owensboro, though over the summer, because of budget constraints suspending court travel, it was moved to Washington DC. During trial preparations, some of the delays in the case for which the government was responsible were revealed. For example, though the plaintiffs had requested that the government produce documents in May 1994, the government did not respond to the request until the end of May 2004. The response, ten years in coming, provided only limited documents from administrative records in 1995 and 1996; the government claimed that some of the documents related to the real estate acquisitions from decades prior had been destroyed, and stated that others were publicly available in national archives in Georgia and Chicago. The initial evidentiary hearing was held as scheduled,

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181 This process is detailed in Section II “Procedural History” of *Land Grantors in Henderson, Union v. United States*, 64 Fed. Cl. 661, 2005 U.S. Claims LEXIS 89 (1 April 2005).

8-11 September 2004, in Washington, and it was reconvened on 23 November. On 11 March 2005, the court called out the government for its earlier dodging of document provision, ordering the government to provide an affidavit that it had searched for and provided to the court all documents produced concerning both the taking of the land in 1942 and the sale of the land and oil, gas, and mineral rights in the 1960s, that had been produced and/or were maintained by the Secretary of War, General Services Administration, Department of the Interior, Department of Defense, and all U.S. National Archives and Records facilities. While the government filed the affidavit a week after it was requested, it subsequently moved to limit the review of documents to the trial record when the court requested specific information about the amount received for coal rights on some tracts. The court denied this motion and requested that the documents be produced by 31 March.<sup>182</sup>

On 1 April 2005, Judge Braden filed an interim report on Senate Bill 794 and a memorandum opinion. In the report, the court determined that, due to insufficient information at the time, the lack of payment for mineral rights when the land was purchased by the government in 1942 had been a “mutual mistake,” but not one for which the pre-camp landowners should have to suffer financially. Furthermore, the court refuted all claims from the government about statutes of limitations and other means by which the landowner claims might be invalid due to the passage time, in part because of new information (such as the value of the minerals) that had materialized over the years,

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<sup>182</sup> This process is detailed in Section II “Procedural History” of *Land Grantors in Henderson, Union v. United States*, 64 Fed. Cl. 661, 2005 U.S. Claims LEXIS 89 (1 April 2005).

as well as the numerous documented efforts of landowners and other interested parties to take action previously. Braden also pointedly noted that “It was the Government that benefitted from the deaths of most of the original landowners and aging of their heirs. And, it was the Government that benefitted from the destruction of documents through agency retention programs.” Further, the government had in some cases cited authorizations for disposal of documents as reason why they could not be produced, when in fact the authorizations had been given well after the documents had been requested. Braden's interim report indicated that the court at that time intended to recommend that compensation be granted to the former landowners, and to overturn the November 1998 ruling so that those excluded by that order could be part of the compensation. Nevertheless, procedure called for interested parties to be allowed to submit more documentation before a final judgment was made. At the end of the report, Braden referenced a 1985 letter by Senator McConnell to Ruby Higginson in which he stated that he shared “your concern for the proper treatment of the landowners.” The judge wrapped up the report by stating, “The United States Court of Federal Claims also shares that concern.”<sup>183</sup>

Throughout 2005 and early 2006, further determination by the court was delayed by ongoing consideration over whether or not the case should be considered as a class action.<sup>184</sup> In June 2006, the court determined the class action designation was applicable,

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183 *Land Grantors in Henderson, Union v. United States*, 64 Fed. Cl. 661, 2005 U.S. Claims LEXIS 89 (1 April 2005).

184 Memorandum Opinion and Order Regarding Reconsideration of December 23 1997 Order Denying Class Action Certification, *Land Grantors v. United States*, 69 Fed. Cl. 435, 2005 U.S. Claims LEXIS 382 (29 December 2005).

and could be reversed later if it created complications in determining compensation for the landowners.<sup>185</sup> Much of 2007 was spent in unsuccessful attempts at a mediation facilitated by Judge Sandra Day O'Connor.<sup>186</sup>

On 18 April 2008, Judge Braden issued her final decision in the case. She affirmed the essential elements of her earlier interim judgement, recommending to Congress that it should appropriate at least \$34,303,980.42 for restitution. This sum covered known and verifiable amounts that the government had obtained by the lease and sale of coal, oil, natural gas, and other mineral rights since 1957. Due to the wording of SB 794, she excluded from the right to settlement those landowners whose property values had been determined by a jury, i.e. those who had gone to trial, since that land had not been sold under a contract with the government which did not take into the consideration oil and mineral values. Braden noted in her decision that the government had also avoided paying at least an additional \$91,709,844.54 in interest on the national debt as a benefit of the revenue, but could not be held liable for this interest. By her calculation the \$34 million she recommended be granted in restitution only covered 27% of the total benefit of \$126,013,824.96 actually received by the government. Braden suggested that the \$34 million be deposited in a trust account, and that a trust officer be charged with distributing the funds based on ownership of the original tracts.<sup>187</sup>

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185 Memorandum Opinion and Order to Grant Class Certification, *Land Grantors v. United States*, 71 Fed. Cl. 614, 2006 U.S. Claims LEXIS 177 (22 June 2006).

186 Mediation Order, *Land Grantors v. United States*, 75 Fed. Cl. 583, 2007 U.S. Claims LEXIS 53 (Fed. Cl., Feb. 28, 2007).

187 Final Report and Memorandum Opinion Regarding S. 794, "A Bill for the Relief of Land Grantors in Henderson, Union, and Webster Counties, Kentucky, and Their Heirs," *Land Grantors v. United States*, 81 Fed. Cl. 580, 2008 U.S. Claims LEXIS 113 (18 April 2008).



Both the landowners group and the government objected to certain aspects of Braden's decision, and a review panel of Federal Claims Court judges read Braden's report and the briefs filed by both sides, and held a hearing on the case on 18 August 2008. In February 2009, the review panel filed its opinion. Two of the judges on the panel sided with the government, primarily on the basis of statutes of limitations on bringing suits, and much of the information in affidavits from original landowners and their heirs was largely filled with hearsay and recollections of events decades in the past by aged individuals. The judges also believed that the lack of payment for oil and minerals could not have been a mutual mistake, as there was sufficient evidence of oil production in the area in 1942. The dissenting Judge from the review panel believed that Braden had reached the correct decision, particularly asserting that statutes of limitations had not been violated since records exist of landowners consistently attempting to get their land back or payment since the 1950s, and that the affidavits of landowners and their heirs were so consistent with each other and the historical record that they should be considered valid evidence. The dissenting judge only objected to Braden's decision in that she had included all of the oil and mineral rights sale and lease value in her calculation of the \$34 million; since the landowners who had pursued court action to determine the value of their land were being excluded from the restitution award, so should the value stemming from their lands. Accordingly, the dissenting Judge argued that the restitution award should total \$23 million.<sup>188</sup> Though the report of the review

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188 Report of Review Panel, *Land Grantors in Henderson, Union, & Webster Counties v. United States*, 2009 U.S. Claims LEXIS 44 (Fed. Cl., Feb. 24, 2009)

Panel was sent back to the Senate Judiciary Committee, no action was taken on it. In effect, the Review Panel's 2-1 decision against providing restitution killed the line of combined Congressional-Federal Claims Court action that had been pursued by Higginson and the Breckinridge Land Committee for 30 years.<sup>189</sup>

Higginson and other heirs of pre-camp landowners have still not given up hope that they might some day receive the compensation that has been fought for, through various means, for over 70 years. They still receive reports monthly from their lawyers, hoping to hear that the Senate might still review the decision in their claims court case. They also continue to petition Kentucky's current Congressional delegation, particularly Senator Mitch McConnell, to take interest in their cause and help bring it back before leaders in Washington.<sup>190</sup> Regardless of whether their ongoing efforts ever result in compensation, the legacy of the both the taking of their land, and their fight against that taking, has been permanently stamped on the Union County landscape.

### ***The camp, corn, and coal***

The hybrid energy landscape of agriculture and fossil fuel production in Union County has not developed in a vacuum. While it has certainly been influenced by regional, national, and global market supply and demand, as all agricultural and resource extraction economies are, government intervention in the form of Camp Breckinridge

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189 Victoria Grabner, "Breckinridge heirs fight to recover land Feds forced families to sell" *Henderson Gleaner* 19 August 2012 Available at <http://www.courierpress.com/news/2012/aug/19/breckinridge-heirs-fight-to-recover-land-feds-to/>.

190 Grabner, "Breckinridge heirs."

initiated changes in the landscape that continue to reverberate well into the twenty-first century. The camp both physically reshaped the landscape, and set the stage for a new landscape of agriculture and coal mining that will be thoroughly discussed in the next chapter.

By amalgamating the coal reserves under over 30,000 acres, the camp enabled a rapid large-scale development of the reserves, initially by a single entity, the Tennessee Valley Authority, that could have been much more difficult had the rights remained in the hands of hundreds of individual owners. The consolidation of small, diversified farms into larger operations focused on corn, wheat, soybeans, cattle, and hogs was a trend nationwide through most of the twentieth century. In Union County, the government's acquisition of hundreds of small farms for the camp and conversion of them into dozens of larger farms when the land was sold decades later imposed the structures of growth on the landscape, rather than allowing it to happen more organically as individuals chose or were forced to leave farming for a variety of circumstances. The conversion from smaller to larger farms should by no means be read as a declension narrative in the case of Union County; as detailed in the introduction, the farm economy in Union County is both one of the strongest in Kentucky and, even after the camp sale, remained based around longstanding, family-owned operations.

Contrary to contemporary division between surface and subsurface rights, on the acres occupied by the camp, the oil, gas and mineral rights had not been separated from ownership of the surface land prior to their sale in 1965. Their separation by the

government furthered divides between many of those in Union County involved in mining and those involved in farming. Surface disturbance necessary for coal mining and oil production was no longer directly part of the landowner's business operations; rather, it often interfered with or caused damage to it, as will be described in the following chapter. Further, as the the public agency, TVA, and the coal company, Peabody, who would develop the coal reserves were neither local entities, an even greater divide was created by the accumulation of mining wealth, which was concentrated outside of the county, and the accumulation of farm wealth, which remained local.

The camp also created a legacy of government appropriation of private farmland in Union County, which affected landowner attitude about future projects involving potential government and corporate appropriation of lands, of either small or large acreages. While some of these projects still were realized, as is discussed in the following chapter, others were successfully rejected by the landowners and their advocates, as is discussed in the last chapter. The camp's legacy of appropriation cast a sense of vulnerability over ownership that simultaneously strengthened ties to the landscape and efforts to fight that vulnerability.

## Chapter 4: Lining up the Landscape—New Infrastructure for Coal and Corn

*Like Eddie's grandparents, they could look out one side of their house and basically see where they originally lived before the land was taken from them for Camp Breckinridge. Then they can look out the other window, and see the belt line bringing their coal, what they felt was their coal, across their property. So that is very hard for people to accept.*

--Judy Espy, wife of Eddie Espy, 2009

*The Tennessee Valley Authority was created to prevent just the sort of arrogant disregard of individual rights that TVA itself is now displaying in Union County.... There are other ways of getting coal from Union County to the Ohio River. A conveyor belt certainly is not vital, or even important to the overall function of the TVA.*

--Editorial, *Henderson Gleaner-Journal*, 9 December 1969

To many in Union County, it seemed that things had returned to some version of normalcy following the public sale of most of the camp lands in 1966. Farmers had wasted no time in improving the land for crop production, and while tractors and combines had moved across some of the fields when they were rented from the government for cropping, their numbers increased and the permanent structures associated with ownership, including grain bins, barns, and farm houses, began to return to the former camp area as well. Though a phalanx of the pre-camp landowners and their descendants were in the middle of their fight for some sort of additional compensation for what they perceived as the government's breach of contract in not giving them the opportunity to repurchase their lands directly and for not compensating them for mineral rights, for the county as a whole there was relief that most of the uncertainty over what would be done with the lands had passed.

In August 1968, three years and three months after purchasing the coal rights

under 31,000 acres of land that had been part of Camp Breckinridge, the Tennessee Valley Authority announced that it would start taking bids for mining its new coal reserves. In particular, it was seeking underground mining of coal in the No. 9 seam, lying at a depth of 300 to 400 feet. The coal was destined to supply TVA's Cumberland Steam Plant, which was then under construction in Stewart County, Tennessee. TVA anticipated that the recoverable coal in the No. 9 seam would yield 70,000-100,000 tons each week for about 15 years. Though it had been argued that TVA had plenty of coal reserves under its control in the disputes over whether TVA would be allowed to purchase the camp coal rights, discussed in the previous chapter, TVA claimed that the new mine was necessary to supply the new plant, as all of the production capacity in Western Kentucky using the technologies of the time was already dedicated to other destinations.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of the announcement, most people in Union County were relieved to hear that their fears that TVA would let the coal reserves sit idle would not be realized. Development of new mines was seen as a potential economic boom for the county after what had been the post-camp times of economic uncertainty, especially for those outside of the farming community. Unknown at the time, however, was just how much the hybrid energy landscape of Union County would be reshaped by these mines, and how much of an impact they would have on many of the county's longstanding farming operations. While the coal and corn coming out of Union County had long flowed through the landscape through various means of transportation, the mines in the former camp area would spawn the construction of dramatic new infrastructure networks for coal

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<sup>1</sup> "TVA Seeks Bids For Mining Its Breck Coal," *Union County Advocate*, 29 August 1968.

transportation and processing, including a sprawling network of multi-mile coal conveyor belt lines. This infrastructure would further bind the county to the Ohio River, as that major artery of North American food and fuel transportation was restrengthened in its role as the primary conduit by which resources left Union County and entered national and international markets. The coal transportation and processing infrastructure would also change the visual experience of the county, the way farmers used and moved around their fields, and the relationships between those involved with farms and with mines.

### ***Coal conveyor belt lines***

Though several short conveyor belts were discussed in Chapter 2, their centrality to this chapter necessitates reviewing and expanding information about their role in mining operations. Industry experts attribute the fundamentals of the design of the mining conveyor belts used today to Thomas Edison, who developed equipment to improve operations at his Ogden iron ore mine in New Jersey in the late 1800s.<sup>2</sup> While most coal mines use multiple conveyors within the mine and processing facilities to move the coal among points of extraction, storage areas, washing facilities, and loading areas, coal leaves mines by different means. Among the most frequently seen, particularly in the eastern half of the United States, are coal trucks and railroads. Trucks and railroads have remained in use for coal transport throughout the rest of the Western Coalfields region of Kentucky, but in Union County all significant rail operation had ceased by the mid-1980s, and coal trucks are an infrequent sight on roads in most of the county, save

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Alsbaugh. *Bulk Material Handling By Conveyor Belt 7* (Littleton, CO: Society for Mining, Metallurgy, and Exploration, 2008).

the area around Caseyville. Since the early 1970s, conveyor belt lines stretching between mine sites and barge loading docks on the Ohio River have been the primary paths by which coal leaves the county's mines and travels to markets (See Figure 4.1).



*Figure 4.1: Coal conveyor belt line on the Espy farm in Union County*

The coal conveyor belt lines discussed in this chapter cover long distances, ranging from nearly a mile to 12.6 miles, crossing property that was not owned by the mine before the construction of the belt (and still often is not, but is rather leased long-term). As these belts traverse the landscape, they closely follow the contour of the land in some places, and run above it held up by supports in others; occasionally they run under the surface of the ground when other landscape features or uses necessitate it. The conveyor belts themselves are generally three to six feet wide; they are covered by a



metal half-tunnel-like structure, but not fully enclosed underneath for most of their length; the newer belts are more enclosed where they cross public roads and highways. Coal is loaded on the belt at the mine or washing/processing facility, and is then carried over the landscape. An observer standing nearby can see the small piles of coal being carried along by the belt. In very long belt systems, including some in Union County, the coal may transfer from one belt to another at intermediate points along the route.

In addition to Union County, multi-mile conveyor belt lines for coal and other minerals have been and are currently used in some other locations in the United States. While these belts typically provide a significant savings over hauling coal by trucks, the ruggedness of terrain in many mining regions, such as the Appalachian mountains of West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky, increases construction challenges and operational safety risks, and has limited their use.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, improvements in conveyor belt technology in recent decades have allowed belts as long as 4.5 miles to be built in the mountains of West Virginia.<sup>4</sup> Multi-mile overland conveyor belt lines have also been constructed in Illinois, Arizona, Wyoming, Texas, and elsewhere. In most cases, even when the terrain is flat or gently rolling, most of these belt lines range in length from

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3 Project Summary: Robinson Run Overland Conveyor. Roberts & Schaefer Company. Available at [www.r-s.com/Projects/Pages/CONSOL-Robinson.../RobinsonRun.pdf](http://www.r-s.com/Projects/Pages/CONSOL-Robinson.../RobinsonRun.pdf). Accessed 10 September 2013; John Cheves, "Coal gets big tax breaks in Kentucky," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 10 January 2010. Available at <http://www.kentucky.com/2010/01/10/1089613/coal-gets-big-tax-breaks-in-kentucky.html>; "Belt line catches fire at Boone County surface mine," *Charleston Gazette*, 18 July 2013. Available at <http://www.wvgazette.com/News/201307180028>. Accessed 11 September 2013; "Enhancing Overland Conveyor Safety and Productivity," *World Coal*, July 2013. Available at <http://news.altramotion.com/index.php/2013/08/enhancing-overland-conveyor-safety-and-productivity/>. Accessed 11 September 2013.

4 "Sprawling Longview Power Plant Taking Shape," *Charleston Daily Mail*, 7 August 2008. Available via <http://www.wvcoal.com/Latest/sprawling-longview-power-plant-taking-shape.html>. Accessed 10 September 2013.

under 1 mile to around 4 miles, rarely approaching the length seen in Union County.<sup>5</sup> It is also rare to see such a dense concentration of publicly visible belt lines as has developed in Union County over the past 40 years. While Union County's belt lines have been and continue to be among the longest in the U.S., much longer lines now exist abroad. Beginning at the Bou Craa mine in the Western Sahara in Africa, a belt line 100km (62 miles) long carries phosphate to the coast for shipping to other continents.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Landscape and infrastructure***

Union County's coal conveyor belt lines are part of regional and national energy infrastructure, along with being part of the county's hybrid energy landscape. Here I use “infrastructure” to refer to all of the durable, tangible construction and apparatus related to the acquisition, transport, storage, and processing of raw sources of energy, as well as the storage and transport of their processed or refined versions. Energy infrastructure is a component of the energy landscape, but as discussed in Chapter 1, landscape goes beyond material entities to include the dimensions of both human culture and the physical environment that both develop and are developed in relation to that infrastructure. As a

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5 Illinois: “Peabody Energy: Gateway Mine.” Available at <http://www.peabodyenergy.com/content/267/Publications/Fact-Sheets/Gateway-Mine> Accessed 10 September 2013; Texas: “Overland Conveyor Company, Inc.: Coal Projects.” Available at <http://www.overlandconveyor.com/consulting/clients-projects/coal-clients.aspx> Accessed 10 September 2013. Note that according to Overland Conveyor, who designed Alcoa Beltline (now Luminant Mining Beltline) in Rockdale, Texas, at 12 miles, this single flight conveyor was the world's longest conventional conveyor at the time of its commission in June 2005; “Black Thunder Thermal Coal Mine, Wyoming, United States of America.” Available at <http://www.mining-technology.com/projects/thunder/>. Accessed 10 September 2013. The author visited a coal conveyor belt line in Arizona in March 2009.

6 Toby Shelley, *Endgame in the Western Sahara: What Future for Africa's Last Colony?* (London: Zed Books, 2004), 70.

key aspect of this, infrastructure both is shaped by socio-cultural factors and has socio-cultural implications.<sup>7</sup>

In considering energy infrastructure and landscapes, I draw on studies of more general industrial infrastructure and landscapes. Studies of industrial landscapes are close kin to the study of energy landscapes, not only because systems of industrial production and energy systems are inextricably intertwined, but because there are strong similarities in the scale and components of the infrastructure of each. They also overlap; refined oil, for example, is both an industrial product and an energy source, and an oil refinery is part of both an industrial and an energy landscape. Applying industrial landscape literature to energy landscapes does not alienate the food-as-fuel component of the hybrid energy landscape; while there have long been parallels, particularly in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the differences between agricultural and industrial infrastructures have diminished. As is the case in Union County and elsewhere, many of the structures associated with grain production and with coal mining are now hard to distinguish.

Studies of landscapes including industrial production and transportation infrastructure have grown significantly in the last quarter century.<sup>8</sup> They are also studied

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7 While I have provided my own interpretation of energy infrastructure here, related issues are discussed in Clark Miller, Alastair Iles, and Christopher Jones, "The Social Dimensions of Energy Transitions," *Science as Culture* 22(2013): 135-148, and Christopher Jones, "Building More Just Energy Infrastructure: Lessons From the Past," *Science as Culture* 22(2013):157-163. See also, Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman, eds., *The Social Shaping of Technology* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999) and Thomas Hughes, "The Evolution of Large Technological Systems," in Wiebe Bijker, Thomas, Hughes, and Trevor Pinch, eds., *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

8 In addition to those I cite in subsequent paragraphs, e.g. Christopher Jones, *Energy Landscapes: Coal Canals, Oil Pipelines, Electricity Transmission Wires in the Mid-Atlantic, 1820-1930*. Publicly

as components of networks that not only enable the flow of resources and products but also form part of the connections between communities and the larger nation and globe.<sup>9</sup> Industrial and energy infrastructures, whether directly sponsored by government entities or by corporations large enough to wield government-like power, have been noted for their pronounced environmental effects being experienced differently and often disproportionately by different population groups, which lends them to examination through the lens of political ecology.<sup>10</sup> Through synthesizing these frameworks with the ongoing narrative of appropriation of agricultural land, continuing from Camp Breckinridge, this chapter looks at late twentieth and early twenty-first century mining infrastructure, alongside agricultural infrastructure, in Union County through overlapping perspectives of industrial landscape studies, networks, and political ecology.

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accessible Penn Dissertations. 2009. <http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/16>; Brian Hayes, *Infrastructure: A Field Guide to the Industrial Landscape* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005); Theodore Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated: Industrialization and the Waters of New England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Ferdic Quivik, "Landscapes as Industrial Artifacts: Lessons from Environmental History," *Industrial Archaeology* 26:2 (2000): 55-64; Brian Black, "Oil Creeks Industrial Apparatus: Re-creating the Industrial Process through the Landscape of Pennsylvania's Oil Boom," *Environmental History* 3 (1998): 210-229.

- 9 By "networks" here, I mean "infrastructural, technically based networks." See "Networks" in *Dictionary of Human Geography Sixth Edition*. Examples of such studies involving industrial and energy infrastructure include Matthew Evenden, "Aluminum, Commodity Chains, and the Environmental History of the Second World War," *Environmental History* 16 (2011): 69-93, and Melvin Johnson and Jonathan Gerland, "Tapping 'Green Gold': The Steam Railroad and Logging Trams of East Texas," *Environmental History* 1 (1996). William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis* also deals with this.
- 10 While the term "political ecology" was for many years considered only applicable to studies in "developing nations," there has been a marked broadening of the theories and practices of the field over the past decade to include studies in the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and other areas of the "developed world." Paul Robbins, *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2011); James McCarthy "First world political ecology: lessons from the Wise Use Movement," *Environment and Planning A* 34 (2002): 1281-1302; "Political Ecology in North America, Special Issue of *Geoforum* 37(2006). Studies of industrial landscapes presented in other scholarly traditions may also be placed in the tradition of political ecology, as they involve the field's main themes, e.g. Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

As described in Chapter 2, the problem of transporting coal once its reserves had been identified was not new in the late twentieth century, demanding solutions since the first mines opened in Union County. Long before Union County existed, coal transportation had been a problem since the beginning of the Industrial Age in Great Britain. While coal and other mining operations have been early adopters of the development of improved canal systems, railroads, and wagon/auto roads that have been a part of general change in industrial infrastructure, they have also been extraordinary innovators of transport methods particularly suited to the output of mines and the landscapes of which they are a part.

In Britain's Ironbridge Gorge region, often called the "Cradle of the Industrial Revolution," the expansion of the coal industry in the 1500s met parallel challenges to the expansion of Union County's coal industry into the interior lands of Camp Breckinridge. In both areas, the coal seams were relatively easy to access, given the technology of the time, and there was a navigable river. In the case of both the Ohio in Union County and the Severn in the Ironbridge Gorge, however, the rivers were not immediately adjacent to the coal mines, requiring a means of moving the coal from the mine to the major transportation outlet. In Broseley, a mining region in the Gorge not conveniently proximate to the river, there were records by 1608 of wooden structures, tramways, engineered to carry coal from the mines to the river bank using horse power. These seventeenth and eighteenth century tramways were often temporary, and at the end of a coal lease were removed and often reused elsewhere. Because of this, there often is

not even archaeological evidence for their presence in the landscape, much less than the enduring visible change in the landscape left by other industrial development in the Ironbridge region. Many of these tramways followed the contours of the land, going up and down hills rather than following the more level routes of railroads, which often required substantial investment in earth moving. In other areas, stone bridges that once held tramways still remain, as well as the meter-wide paths where they ran along the ground. Even in the late 1860s, after the expansion of railroads across the landscape, tramways linked to them and still remained an important part of the industrial transportation network of the region.<sup>11</sup>

The problem of getting coal from the mine to the river inspired further innovations in the Ironbridge Gorge region, with further parallels to Union County. In many places along the Severn, the slopes leading down to the river were too steep for the tramway horses and their carts to navigate, which led to the innovation of the 'wind,' or short incline. Twentieth century coal conveyor belt lines echo these inclines, which operated on a chain that simultaneously lowered loaded wagons down the slope as it raised back up the empty wagons. The very earliest-known versions of these inclines in the Ironbridge date to 1607, and used rope in place of chain.<sup>12</sup>

These tramways and inclines are examples of how materials- and landscape-specific infrastructure was integrated with more arterial and general-purpose river and railroad transportation to add both essential functionality and density to the transportation

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11 James Alfrey and Catherine Clark, *The Landscape of Industry: Patterns of Change in the Ironbridge Gorge* (London: Routledge, 1993), 14-15, 70-71.

12 Alfrey and Clark, *The Landscape of Industry*, 72-73.

networks. Both landscape and culture helped to determine the form that these additions to the transportation network took, much as they would shape the construction of the coal conveyor belt lines in Union County. While providing a solution to moving the raw materials (needed for energy production, in the case of coal) these structures not only negotiated the landscape, but also changed it, sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently. These changes helped to develop the industrial landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge, much as belt lines helped to further develop the hybrid energy landscape of Union County.

The construction of the long distance coal-conveyor belt lines that began to reshape the Union County landscape in the late 1960s and early 1970s was precipitated by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), a government agency. President Franklin Roosevelt was a strong advocate for the creation of a Tennessee Valley Authority, in part because the region had been especially hard-hit by the Great Depression, as a way to create hope for economic recovery and better lives in the region. In petitioning to Congress for action to establish the TVA, President Roosevelt stated,

I, therefore, suggest to the Congress legislation to create a Tennessee Valley Authority, a cooperation clothed with the power of Government but possessed of the flexibility and initiative of a private enterprise. It should be charged with the broadest duty of planning for the proper use, conservation and development of the natural resources of the Tennessee River drainage basin and its adjoining territory for the general social and economic welfare of the Nation.<sup>13</sup>

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13 Franklin Roosevelt, "A Suggestion for Legislation to Create the Tennessee Valley Authority, April 10, 1933," *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt With a Special Introduction and Explanatory Notes by President Roosevelt*, Volume 2, *The Year of Crisis, 1933* (New York, Random House, 1938), 122-29.

The Tennessee Valley Authority was established in May 1933 by an Act of Congress. Focused around the nation's fourth-largest river system and its watershed, the agency had as its goals flood control and improved navigability of the Tennessee River, improved agricultural practices on the Valley's farmland, and generation and provision of electric power to stimulate economic growth and encourage a a perceived higher standard of living for the Valley's residents.<sup>14</sup> Though the TVA served only a limited area, of which Union County was not a part resources from Union County and many other areas outside of the Tennessee Valley were used to fulfill TVA's mission.

By the early 1960s, an imbalance had emerged as the TVA fulfilled its goals, so that power became its main focus. TVA essentially became the power company of the Tennessee Valley, with power generation expanding beyond hydroelectric dams to large coal-fired steam plants, and, by the 1970s, nuclear power plants. TVA's ability to provide more electricity was significantly enhanced in 1959, when Congressional action permitted the agency to finance its power program by marketing bonds, which would facilitate the substantial investments in coal reserves and power plants that it would make throughout the 1960s and 70s.<sup>15</sup>

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14 The history of the TVA has been written and analyzed from many perspectives. From within the institution itself, on the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, there is *A History of the Tennessee Valley Authority* (Knoxville: Tennessee Valley Authority Information Office, 1983). As a general history also see North Callahan, *TVA: Bridge Over Troubled Waters* (Cranbury, NJ: A.S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1980).

Analyses of TVA's leadership and organizational structure include: Phillip Selznick, *TVA and the Grass Roots: A Study in the Sociology of Formal Organization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949); Richard Colignon, *Power Plays: Critical Events in the Institutionalization of the Tennessee Valley Authority* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); and Erwin Hargrove, *Prisoners of Myth: The Leadership of the Tennessee Valley Authority, 1933-1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

15 Hargrove, *Prisoners*, 4, 155; *Power Annual Report 1969* (Knoxville: Tennessee Valley Authority, 1969).



While TVA had been purchasing coal from Union County coal mines prior to its purchase and opening of the Camp Breckinridge coal reserves, the development of that coal field, and the corporate partnerships it used to do so, changed it from an out-of-sight consumer to a dominant force of change in the county. The TVA would be part to significantly increasing the amount of industrial infrastructure and activity in Union County's dominantly agricultural landscape. In order to understand the situation into which the TVA mines, 12.6 mile long TVA belt line, and subsequent long-distance conveyors and other mining structures were introduced, it is important to understand the economic environment of Union County at the time, especially the state of mining development.

### ***Union County's changing geography of mining***

The late 1960s marked a major transition in the geography of Union County coal mining. Beginning with the closing of the 300-employee Poplar Ridge mine in 1957, the Sturgis-DeKoven area, the center of Union County mining for over a century, lost three major mining operations in just over a decade. In July 1968, Kansas City, Missouri-based Pittsburg & Midway Coal Company, which had acquired several mines in the county, closed the No. 6 seam mine at DeKoven, which resulted in 272 jobs lost. This mine had been in operation since 1963 and was known for its accidents and potential for accidents. According to its Operations Manager Buddie Morris, its closure was due to “natural conditions which are uncontrollable,” including geology which caused structural

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See also similarly titled and published reports for the years 1970-1975.

instabilities that were too costly to fix and keep the mine economically feasible.<sup>16</sup> On 31 January 1969, P&M also permanently closed the No. 9 mine at DeKoven, which employed around 250 people. This mine had experienced a fire beginning on 5 November 1968, attributed to an overheated conveyor belt roller inside the mine, and never recovered.<sup>17</sup>

The economic impact of these closures was mitigated somewhat by new mining developments in the county. The combination of the closures and these new mines signified a transition in both geography and technology of Union County mining. From the Sturgis-Dekoven area, in the western and southwestern areas of the county, in close proximity to the Tradewater and Ohio Rivers, the new developments shifted the areas of most active and productive mining to the east and northeast. Most of the newer mines were also farther inland, and, since they were developed long after the mostly-coal-motivated railroad system had been constructed in the county, they were not necessarily near the existing rail lines. The construction of the new mines involved not only new geographical areas, but also the adoption and creation of innovative methods for negotiating these geographies.

While a mine had existed near the river in Uniontown since the early 1950s, the late 1960s brought large mining operations to northern Union County. In October 1968, Island Creek Coal Company, then a part of parent company Occidental Petroleum Corporation, dedicated the new \$20 million James L. Hamilton mine, located 8 miles

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16 "P&M Closes No. 6 Mine at DeKoven," *Union County Advocate*, 6 February 1969.

17 "Carbon Dioxide Used To Stop Mine Fire," *Union County Advocate*, 21 November 1968; "P&M Closes No. 9 Mine At DeKoven," *Union County Advocate*, 6 February 1969.

west of Morganfield.<sup>18</sup> At that time, Island Creek, headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, was the third largest bituminous coal producer in the U.S.. California-based Occidental was a multi-national corporation. Sturgis native R.D. Herron served as president of Island Creek's Western Kentucky division. At the time of its dedication on 18 October, 80 percent of the anticipated production of the Hamilton mine had been sold to TVA and the Indiana-Kentucky Electric Corporation. At the dedication, local holders of coal rights were praised for cooperating with Island Creek, so the company could acquire the 18,000 acres of coal rights with deposits across the 6, 9, and 11 seams, yielding the anticipated 250,000,000 ton reserve that justified a mine that was, according to namesake Hamilton, “not only one of the largest, but it is also one of the most efficient in the world.” The mine was considered significant enough to the Kentucky economy that the Commonwealth's governor attended and spoke at the dedication.<sup>19</sup>

The Hamilton mine's elaborate infrastructure was heavily focused on establishing mechanical routes by which the coal could be transported around and out of the mine complex. The concrete-lined air intake and exhaust shafts were both 17 feet in diameter and roughly 600 feet to the coal seam. The main slope shaft of the mine measured 2,140 feet in length on an 18 degree angle, and was 12 feet wide by 14 feet tall. The 48 inch wide slope belt was mounted on top of a concrete partition splitting the slope down the middle; it operated at a speed of 600 feet per minute and had the capacity to move coal out of the mine at a rate of 1,500 tons per hour. The slope belt sent coal into a concrete

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18 “Many Dignitaries Coming For Dedication Of New Mine,” *Union County Advocate*, 17 October 1968.

19 “More Coal Development Predicted By Hamilton,” *Union County Advocate*, 24 October 1968.

storage bin 85 feet tall and 65 feet wide. From the storage bin, a belt carried the coal to the screening and crushing building, where the coal was broken down and separated by size; another conveyor transported coal in need of washing to the heavy media preparation plant and back. After the coal had been sorted and processed, a 3,800 foot long, 48 inch wide conveyor belt carried it to the clean coal stockpile area at a rate of 600 feet per minute. The conveyor moved the coal to the top of a 110 foot tall, 12 foot diameter silo with 22 openings on its sides; this allowed coal to flow out of the silo into the open storage area while minimizing the release of fine coal dust into the air. An identical silo stood 165 feet away, connected to the first by a conveyor belt. Beneath the stockpile, which had a capacity of storing 150,000 tons of cleaned coal, fourteen vibrating feeders could, with any subset of seven working simultaneously, load coal onto a river-bound conveyor belt at a rate of 5,000 tons per hour.

The conveyor belt line leading away from the stockpile was 72 inches wide and 4,300 feet long; it operated at a speed of 750 feet per minute. On this belt's path to the river it traversed flood-prone lands, and was elevated 30 feet by concrete columns and beams to avoid high water damage. The river loading dock at the end of the belt was described as “one of the most modern in the world”; from it, coal could be loaded onto barges at the rate of 4,000 tons per hour.<sup>20</sup> Once it reached the river, the conveyor dumped the coal into a transfer house, where the coal moved onto two shuttle belts which carried it out to the river barges; the shuttle belts could be raised or lowered to adjust to changes in the river level. The shuttle belts had the capacity to load fifteen 1,500 ton-

<sup>20</sup> Photo Caption, *Union County Advocate*, 17 October 1968.

capacity barges (a full tow) in under five hours.<sup>21</sup>

While the Hamilton belt line was not the first constructed in Union County, as discussed in Chapter 2, it was more striking on the landscape because it crossed a public road and farm land visible from that road. Yet, this public road was out-of-the-way and not heavily traveled, and because the concrete columns were fairly narrow in diameter, yet widely-spaced, essentially forming a one-dimensional line across the landscape, the belt line did not have a dramatic impact on farming practices—less than, for example, an easement for overhead electric power lines would. Furthermore, this belt line was crossing farmland that was already problematic due to flooding, with wildly fluctuating cropability and yields depending on the year's weather conditions. The mine itself was situated in one of the few rugged, hilly areas in the county, at best suitable for grazing livestock, but not even ideal for that. The Hamilton mine brought a new area into Union County's mining landscape, but its presence had minimal physical impact on Union County farming practices, and its visual impact was even mitigated by the remoteness of its location.

In July 1969, Island Creek began construction on another mine facility a few miles farther inland from the Ohio River; the company named it Hamilton 2, and the original Hamilton mine became Hamilton 1. The Hamilton 2 mine was opened to access coal reserves that, with limitations of the technologies at the time, could not be reached underground from Hamilton 1 due to a geological fault. While the Hamilton 2 mine included a large storage silo completed by late August 1970, it did not include any

<sup>21</sup> "Hamilton Mine Is BIG Operation," *Union County Advocate*, 17 October 1968.

processing facilities, instead sharing them with Hamilton 1. The Hamilton 2 mine entered into coal production in stages, with a new unit opening roughly every three months, beginning in September 1970 and continuing through Fall 1971. Anticipated annual production at full operation for the mine was 1,500,000 tons of coal annually, at a daily production of 30,000 tons per day.<sup>22</sup>

In order to share processing facilities, the coal from Hamilton 2 had to be transported to Hamilton 1; Island Creek chose to construct a 19,000 ft, 36-inch wide overland coal conveyor belt line to accomplish this. Beginning in August 1968, when the Hamilton 2 mine was still in the “dream stage,” and continuing through 1969, the company sought and subsequently gained permission from Union County's Fiscal Court to have the belt line connecting the two mines crossing over two roads and under one, as well as using the right-of-way attached to the county road that served the Hamilton 1 mine.<sup>23</sup> In March and April 1969, the Union County Fiscal Court heard requests from two property owners, Mr. and Mrs. George Todd and Mrs. George Veltman, who had a house near the planned belt line route, asking for the route to be changed to be farther from their property. Their lawyer, Will Tom Wathen, said they were concerned about “the damaging effect coal dust and dirt from the belt would have on the property and the house.” Through the Fiscal Court, the concerned property owners and Island Creek eventually agreed on a route for the line that met the needs of both parties, using right-of-

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22 “Court Gives Island Creek Okeh,” *Union County Advocate*, 11 December 1969; “Full production at new IC mine 12 months away,” and photos, *Union County Advocate*, 27 August 1970.

23 “Island Creek may open new mine,” *Union County Advocate*, 29 August 1968; “Court Gives Island Creek Okeh” *Union County Advocate*, 11 December 1969.

way from a willing nearby landowner.<sup>24</sup> After traveling from Hamilton 2 to Hamilton 1 and being processed there, the coal traveled on the existing belt line to the river.<sup>25</sup>

While these two mines brought hundreds of new jobs to Union County, the construction and opening of Hamilton 2 was clouded by speculation over the closing of the existing Island Creek mine at Uniontown. The Uniontown mine was the oldest of Island Creek's mines that were still active in Union County. The mine had been extracting coal from the No. 9 seam since 1952, when it was developed by the Nashville-based coal investor Justin Potter. In 1955, Potter had sold the mine and other mine holdings in Western Kentucky to the Western Kentucky Coal Company, from which Island Creek acquired the property in 1963. In developing the mine, Potter had invested in the construction of a belt line to the river. Though it would be very short by later standards, at the time it was considered one of the longest existing coal belts, which had remained in use through the mine's closing.<sup>26</sup> By the summer of 1970, production was dwindling at the mine, the facility was no longer washing or processing coal, and miners were working to recover potentially marketable coal from refuse piles and sludge ponds.<sup>27</sup> In early November 1970, Island Creek officials in Cleveland, Ohio, stated that the company's mine at Uniontown would convert from mining the No. 9 seam to the No. 11 seam, seemingly squashing the idea that a new mine would be built or that the existing

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24 "No Action On Beltline Site," *Union County Advocate*, 27 March 1969; "County Okehs Hospital Road," *Union County Advocate*, 10 April 1969; "Deputy Salaries Set By Court," *Union County Advocate*, 24 April 1969.

25 "Court Gives Island Creek Okeh," *Union County Advocate*, 11 December 1969.

26 "Uniontown Mine will close February 26," *Union County Advocate*, 18 February 1971.

27 "Full production at new IC mine 12 months away," *Union County Advocate*, 27 August 1970.

one would completely close and workers would be moved elsewhere. Island Creek officials stated that the converted mine would be named “The Ohio River No. 11 mine,” and would produce roughly 1 million tons of coal per year and maintain a work force of 200. Some of the physical infrastructure used from the No. 9 seam could be reused for the No. 11, but construction of a new tippie was necessary. Officials estimated that workforce needs would likely be cut by one-third, to 200, though though locals speculated that the extra 100 miners would be “taken care of” by Island Creek.<sup>28</sup> Despite the publicizing of these plans, work progressed slowly on the No. 11 seam mine. In mid-February 1971, Island Creek announced that it would be closing its Uniontown mine entirely at the end of the month. While it was considered likely that some of this mine's infrastructure, such as the belt line, would be brought back into service for the extraction of No. 11 seam coal in the same area, Island Creek provided no firm information on when they would begin mining that seam at the time of the closure.<sup>29</sup> By Fall 1971, the Ohio River No. 11 was in operation, though with 88 coal miners rather than the anticipated 200.<sup>30</sup>

The official closure of the Uniontown mine came at a time when labor needs and the labor pool started to become less stable at the Hamilton 1 mine. In late February, Island Creek cancelled third shift production at Hamilton 1, which left 104 miners out of work. While which miners were laid off was supposed to be determined by seniority, a UMWA official propagated information that seniority rules had not been followed in

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28 “Uniontown Mine name changed, seam opened,” *Union County Advocate*, 5 November 1970.

29 “Uniontown Mine will close February 26,” *Union County Advocate*, 18 February 1971.

30 “Miners' walkout economic blow,” *Union County Advocate*, 7 October 1971.



some cases.<sup>31</sup> In mid-April, 400 Hamilton 1 miners went against the advice of the UMWA and staged a wildcat strike with a number of complaints about wages, hours, and job assignments.<sup>32</sup> The miners returned to work within a few days, only to strike a second time, one week after the first, with primary grievances being start times for miners employed in certain types of tasks.<sup>33</sup> After a third walk out within a two week period, negotiations among Island Creek, the local, and the UMWA, partly mediated by the Union County Circuit Court, resulted in resolution of the issues.<sup>34</sup> While Spring 1971 labor disputes at Hamilton 1 were resolved relatively quickly, they reveal that despite mining's growing presence on the landscape in the hard physical concrete and metal of infrastructure, it was still fraught with the instabilities of human labor and power struggles.

### ***TVA and Peabody***

While Island Creek's development of the Hamilton complex expanded a previously minor mining region in Union County, and introduced multiple miles of overland conveyor belt line across agricultural land, its impacts on the Union County landscape, and the county's farms, were overshadowed by the opening of mines in the former Camp Breckinridge area.

As detailed in Chapter 3, in April 1965, the Tennessee Valley Authority purchased

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31 "3rd shift production cancelled [sic] at Hamilton," *Union County Advocate*, 4 March 1971; "100 miners still out of work," *Union County Advocate*, 4 March 1971.

32 "400 coal miners still on strike," *Union County Advocate*, 22 April 1971.

33 "Unhappy miners strike at Hamilton 2<sup>nd</sup> time in week," *Union County Advocate*, 29 April 1971.

34 "Simpson continues motion request; miners go back," *Union County Advocate*, 6 May 1971.

the coal rights under nearly 31,000 acres of land that had been part of Camp Breckinridge. TVA's purchase was surrounded by controversy, both because the pre-military owners of the land had not been compensated for those mineral rights, and because the general public believed that the TVA would not develop the lands in the near future, thus robbing the county of potential economic development and tax revenue that would have been gained had the rights been purchased by one or several private companies.

While the issue of compensation for the former landowners of Camp Breckinridge remained, in August 1968, TVA announced that it would take bids for mining the camp area coal lying in the No. 9 seam, between 300 and 400 feet under the ground.<sup>35</sup> In addition to the expansion of its power program, TVA's rationale for opening the camp reserve was a perceived vulnerability in the coal stockpiles for its steam plants due to insufficient coal production nationally and contracts deliveries that were not fully met.<sup>36</sup> In mid-February 1969, TVA announced the outcome of the bids to mine its Camp Breckinridge coal rights holdings. Peabody Coal Company won the contract by bidding to produce 120 million tons of coal from the Number 9 seam, at a cost of \$3.95 per ton over 15 years, beginning in fall 1971. The contract called for 140,000 tons per week at

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<sup>35</sup> "TVA Seeks Bids For Mining Its Breck Coal," *Union County Advocate*, 29 August 1968.

<sup>36</sup> *Power Annual Report 1970* (Knoxville: Tennessee Valley Authority, 1970), 19. Perspectives differ on the issue of why the contracts were not being met. In May 1970, TVA sued three mining companies, including Pyro and Black Tam of Sturgis, for not honoring federal contracts to deliver coal since November 1969. TVA lawyers argued that without the planned deliveries, the agency suffered a "dire and critical shortage of coal." Lawyers for the mining companies argued that their clients were losing around \$1 per ton on coal deliveries to TVA, because the contracts had no "escalator clauses" through which coal companies could renegotiate prices as production costs increased, which was a particular burden on the smaller firms. "\$20 Million Suit Filed Against Coal Firms," *Union County Advocate*, 28 May 1970.

full production to be delivered to TVA's Cumberland steam plant in Stewart County, Tennessee, scheduled to open in phases in 1972 and 1973. The annual payroll of the mine was anticipated to be around \$8 million. This was not the first foray into Union County for St. Louis-based Peabody, the largest coal producer in the United States at the time. As described in Chapter 2, Peabody had briefly owned the former Poplar Ridge mine near Sturgis. Peabody had also been the highest private bidder in the sale of the Camp Breckinridge coal rights in April 1965, but its bid of \$54 per acre, or \$1,652,000, had been far lower than TVA's bid of \$7,419,000.<sup>37</sup> The *Union County Advocate* called the TVA-Peabody contract “the biggest industrial development in the history of Union County,” acknowledging that it would exceed the operations at Island Creek's Hamilton complex in scale, output, and footprint on the landscape.<sup>38</sup>

Peabody announced soon after receiving the contract that it would construct two slope mines, similar in operation to the Island Creek Hamilton 1 mine.<sup>39</sup> Company officials described the specific locations of the mines using the place names imposed by the military, stating that they would be in “Area A” and “Area B” of the former camp.<sup>40</sup> The *Advocate* fluctuated in its descriptions, among the old military place names, pre-camp identifiers—such as “the old H.A. Spencer farm,” and the names of post-camp owners, e.g. “now owned by T.O Logsdon.”<sup>41</sup> While the mines were bringing changes to

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37 “TVA Awards Breck Coal Contract,” *Union County Advocate*, 13 February 1969; Tennessee Valley Authority, *Power Annual Report: 1970*, 19.

38 “TVA Awards Breck Coal Contract,” *Union County Advocate*, 13 February 1969.

39 “TVA Awards Breck Coal Contract,” *Union County Advocate*, 13 February 1969.

40 “Areas A and B Mine Locations,” *Union County Advocate*, 20 February 1969.

41 “Peabody Starts Core Drilling,” *Union County Advocate*, 20 February 1969.

the landscape that promised positive economic development, these shifting descriptors demonstrate the cultural legacy of the acquisition of farm land for the camp, and are reminders of just how intertwined the military's occupation of Union County's land was with the expansion of its coal mining industry.

As plans for the construction of the mine progressed, the specific landowners of the areas Peabody planned to acquire were named. One of the mine entrances would be on land owned by the Logsdon Brothers on Ky. 141 in the McClure's Cemetery neighborhood. Another was owned by W.L. Rhea in the cantonment area, and included the site that had been used to house prisoners of war.<sup>42</sup> On 27 October 1969, Peabody's contractors for tunnel construction, McGuire Shaft & Tunnel Corporation, began moving equipment onto the Logsdon farm site; a few days later, Corum Brothers, contracted to move dirt to prepare the site, arrived on the Logsdon farm. The tunnel contractors estimated that it would take 18 months to complete the 1,600 foot tunnel to the No. 9 seam, located at a depth of 360 feet.<sup>43</sup>

Peabody wanted 220 acres for the mine entrance; these acres were part of a 1,514 acre tract that the Logsdons had purchased from the General Services Administration at the Camp Breckinridge land sale in 1966. The Logsdon Brothers questioned the right of Peabody and TVA to take over such a substantial chunk of their land for a mine entrance. In early May 1970, the *Advocate* reported that Logsdon Farms, Inc., had filed a complaint in Union County Circuit Court seeking \$528,000 in damages against Peabody, McGuire

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42 "TVA Still Pondering Transportation For Breckinridge Coal," *Union County Advocate*, 16 October 1969.

43 "Work Starts On New Mine," *Union County Advocate* 30 October 1969.

Shaft & Tunnell [sic] Corporation; Corum; and Henderson-Union Rural Electric Corporation. The complaint claimed that there was no “recordable instrument” in the Union County Court Clerk's office that gave TVA (and by extension its lease holder Peabody) the right to disturb the surface land to acquire the coal underneath.<sup>44</sup> This was the first suit filed in Union Circuit Court in conjunction with the construction of the TVA-Peabody mines in the Camp area, but it was not the only legal conflict that accompanied the development of the mines.

While Union Countians were certainly aware of the 1963 Clean Air Act, 1965 Water Quality Act, and other federal legislation that passed in the wave of growing environmental concern in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it is difficult to determine local attitudes toward these developments.<sup>45</sup> In 1970 in Union County, concerns about and opposition to the recent and developing giant coal mining operations seem to have primarily involved property rights and the use of agricultural land for mine infrastructure, rather than the potential air and water implications of coal-fired power plants. While Union Countians recognized the need for and were involved in efforts to curtail soil erosion and to generally promote soil and water conservation on their farms, as indicated by weekly *Advocate* articles on these efforts by Roy Graff, Union County Soil Conservationist, it is likely that much of the local population was only just beginning to relate to the environmental movement and its effects burgeoning across the United States

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44 “Logsdon Farms Sue For Half Million,” *Union County Advocate*, 7 May 1970. While eminent domain was not explicitly mentioned in the coverage of this suit, it is the right of TVA to exercise eminent domain for the purposes of a mine entrance operated by a private contractor that was in question.

45 Articles about passage of this legislation appeared in the *Advocate*.

to their local lives.

### ***The Big Belt Line***

Immediately upon the announcement of the Peabody contract, speculation had begun about how coal would be transported out of the camp mine complex. Both TVA and Peabody initially refused to comment on this, though “one well informed source” believed that a belt line to the Ohio River might be constructed, despite the availability of Illinois Central railroad transportation in the area.<sup>46</sup> As it became more apparent that the river would be part of the transportation network, concerns immediately arose about how to move coal between the mine, located far from the river, and the barges on the Ohio which would transport it.

In October 1969, TVA confirmed that it would transport the coal from the camp mines to the Ohio River using a roughly 13 mile long conveyor belt line, said to be the longest ever constructed at the time. Multiple other solutions were floated for transporting the coal, including flying coal by airplane to the Cumberland City site and “bombing” the stockpiles with it; an underground coal pipeline; and a private highway to which only 100-ton coal trucks would have access.<sup>47</sup> The alternative to a belt line which was most seriously considered involved a rail system that would have combined existing lines with new construction. The railroad solution was rejected in part due to long-term cost, but also because running the loaded rail cars out to the river and empty cars back

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<sup>46</sup> “TVA Awards Breck Coal Contract,” *Union County Advocate*, 13 February 1969.

<sup>47</sup> “12.6 mile conveyor belt carries first 'test' coal,” *Union County Advocate*, 30 September 1971.

would have caused major traffic issues, as the railroad would have had to cross US Highway 60, which spans the United States between the east and west coasts, and was and remains the most traveled road in Union County.<sup>48</sup> TVA attributed one of the barriers to fulfillment of coal contracts it held in the late 1960s to be insufficient coal transportation infrastructure, and so the belt line was a solution to this problem that seemed less vulnerable to disruption.<sup>49</sup>

As has been described, this new beltline was not the first in Union County, nor the first in the county to be considered a feat for its length. The particular type of conveyor belt system that TVA and Peabody chose to use, a cable conveyor belt, had been developed in England in the early 1950s. As opposed to a conventional belt system, in which the belt is directly driven by a motor, in the selected cable belt system, a motor drives 2.5 inch steel wire cables which supported the rubber belt. The cost of operating a cable belt was approximately half the cost of operating the conventional belt, as the cable belt system required less infrastructure and less power.<sup>50</sup>

One of the companies bidding on the contract to construct the belt line, Continental Conveyor & Equipment Company, of Birmingham, Alabama, estimated that construction of the belt line would cost \$16 million. That company requested that the Union County Fiscal Court administer a bond issue for construction of the belt line, which would have also entangled the county government in the burden of land acquisition for the line. The county magistrates generally did not wish to enter into the

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48 "Conveyor Belts To Transport TVA Coal," *Union County Advocate*, 30 October 1969.

49 Tennessee Valley Authority, *Power Annual Report: 1970*, 19.

50 "12.6 mile conveyor belt carries first 'test' coal," *Union County Advocate*, 30 September 1971.

business of condemning their constituents' land, and then-County Judge Executive Tommy Luckett stated that he “didn't want any part of this,” while also anticipating that the TVA would condemn the land regardless of what level of involvement the county government had.<sup>51</sup>

In late November 1969, TVA announced who had won the contracts for belt line and barge transportation of the coal from the Camp Breckinridge mines. American Commercial Barge Lines Company, a Jeffersonville, Indiana-based component of the Inland Waterways Division of Texas Gas Transmission Company gained the estimated \$88 million contract for moving an estimated 120 million tons of coal over as many as 20 years, at the rate of roughly 140,000 tons per week. American Commercial Barge Lines contracted with British firm Cable Belt Conveyors, Inc. to construct the actual cable belt line. Between Uniontown and its destination of the Cumberland Steam Plant in Tennessee, the coal would travel in tows of 15 barges on the Ohio and Lower Tennessee Rivers, and ultimately reach the Cumberland River by way of the canal connecting Lakes Kentucky and Barkley (the completed plant sat right on the Cumberland River, southwest of Clarksville, TN). While TVA planned for shipments to begin in the summer of 1971, they would not reach the full 140,000 tons per week until the second generating unit of the power plant was in operation, scheduled for the spring of 1973.<sup>52</sup>

When TVA and its contractors began planning the route for the belt line and conducting preliminary surveys in December 1969, media coverage, while not initially

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51 “Estimated Cost of New Belt Line \$16 Million,” *Union County Advocate*, 30 October 1969.

52 “Conveyor, Barge Contracts Are Awarded For Breck Coal,” *Union County Advocate*, 26 November 1969; Tennessee Valley Authority, *Power Annual Report 1970*, 19.



explicitly mentioning the Camp Breckinridge Land Controversy, certainly seemed to have that history hanging over it. The *Advocate* emphasized the steps in the process of notifying landowners, and emphasized quotes from “TVA officials” stating that communications were in progress with those landowners whose land the line would cross to “assure an understanding of TVA's intention to compensate them for any damages done.” The *Advocate* also communicated TVA's claims about the appraisal process, which had been so problematic in the camp land acquisitions:

TVA says its appraisers will develop information as to current market values of land in the vicinity, and at least two appraisers will inspect every tract of land to insure uniformity. The power agency said that TVA's offers have been accepted by approximately 95 percent of the landowners involved in its land acquisition work in other areas.<sup>53</sup>

The *Advocate* was also eager to publicize the names of those potentially affected by the line, publishing a long list of all landowners the newspaper believed might potentially be affected, while the planning and surveying were still in their very preliminary stages.<sup>54</sup> As conveyed by the quote at the beginning of the chapter, the *Gleaner-Journal* in neighboring Henderson County was skeptical of TVA's actions in regards to the belt line, and believed that its construction went beyond the intended purpose of the agency.<sup>55</sup>

By mid-January of 1970, the center line survey for the conveyor belt had been

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53 “TVA Land Acquisition To Start In Early Spring,” *Union County Advocate*, 11 December 1969. The claim that 95% of landowners “accepted” TVA's offers may be a misleading one; however, the *Federal Rules of Civil Procedure* Title IX: Special Proceedings, Rule 71.1 “Condemning Real or Personal Property” explains the TVA procedure for assessing condemned lands and notes that “This procedure has worked to the satisfaction of the property owners and the TVA.” Available at [http://www.law.cornell.edu/rules/frcp/rule\\_71.1](http://www.law.cornell.edu/rules/frcp/rule_71.1). Very specific cases of TVA's use of eminent domain to acquire land for dam construction in the 1930s are explored in Carl Kitchens “The use of eminent domain in land assembly: The case of the Tennessee Valley Authority,” *Public Choice* (2013).

54 “28 Farmers' Land May Be Affected By Coal Belt Line,” *Union County Advocate*, 18 December 1969.

55 “TVA flexes its arrogance” (editorial), *Henderson Gleaner-Journal*, 9 December 1969.

completed, and the *Advocate* published a rough description of its planned route, including the roads it would cross and names of affected landowners. The belt would cross US-60, KY-141 (locally known as the St. Vincent Road), and KY-359 (locally known as the Hitesville Road), and tracts belonging to 35 property owners or owner groups. George Sharp, TVA's chief land buyer, praised the involved property owners for their cooperation during the survey.<sup>56</sup>

Despite this “cooperation,” many concerns arose when the belt line route was announced, particularly among the affected landowners. Among these was the City of Morganfield, which had recently acquired a chunk of former Camp Breckinridge land containing a 2,700 foot landing strip; the proposed belt line route traversed this property, and their concerns were among the first to receive publicity. While the main airport serving the camp had been miles away at Sturgis, Morganfield still considered this landing strip as a potential asset for luring industrial development to the area. The city planned to apply for state and federal funds for its improvement and expansion, including possibly lengthening the strip and building a second runway; however, there were fears among community members that if the belt line passed too close to the airport site, the conveyor would jeopardize its potential for use, and of course the potential funding for its development. The city formally requested help from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in assessing the situation. While Morganfield was operating under the assumption that TVA had full condemnation rights on all land needed for the belt line, there had been instances in which the FAA stepped in to help change TVA plans when a project

<sup>56</sup> “Peabody Belt Location Finalized,” *Union County Advocate*, 22 January 1970.

threatened to debilitate the sole airport in a community.<sup>57</sup> In late April 1970, the Morganfield City Council voted to accept TVA's condemnation offer of \$20,300 for the roughly 26 acres needed for the beltline crossing over the airport land, after City Attorney Will Tom Wathen had attempted to negotiate the figure with TVA but found the agency unwilling.<sup>58</sup>

The first legal challenge to TVA's efforts to acquire land for the belt line right-of-way came in mid-April 1970. The belt line route crossed the tracks and right-of-way owned by Illinois Central Railroad Company, which had hoped to become part of the rail network which had been proposed but ultimately rejected for transporting the coal. Illinois Central filed a complaint in United States District Court in Owensboro arguing that TVA's power to condemn property for a right-of-way did not apply in Union County because the land is outside the Tennessee River watershed area. As part of its complaint, Illinois Central also asserted its own status as a potential carrier of the coal, stating that its longstanding lines in the county were “fully adequate to transport coal from any mine operated at the former Camp Breckinridge Military Reservation, for the use and benefit of the defendant, TVA, to barge loading facilities of the defendant, American Commercial Barge Lines.” Illinois Central claimed that construction of the belt line would be “an unnecessary and wasteful duplication of existing transportation facilities” and so there was no public good to be achieved by taking the railroad's land.<sup>59</sup>

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57 Photo caption, *Union County Advocate*, 22 January 1970; “In Belt Line Location, FFA [sic] Assistance Sought By City,” *Union County Advocate*, 19 February 1970.

58 “City Accepts Offer Of TVA For Property,” *Union County Advocate*, 30 April 1970.

59 “I.C. Challenges TVA On Right-Of-Way,” *Union County Advocate*, 16 April 1970.

On 1 June 1970, Judge James Gordon of the U.S. District Court at Louisville dismissed the complaint, thus ruling in favor of TVA.<sup>60</sup> In early July, Illinois Central filed an appeal in Cincinnati with the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals.<sup>61</sup> The appeal was rejected, as the court confirmed that, under TVA's enabling legislation, the agency had the right to condemn land as part of transportation needs for power generation, even if that land was outside of the Tennessee Valley.<sup>62</sup>

A group of Union County landowners also filed a complaint against TVA, Peabody, and American Commercial Barge Lines. Their complaint argued that even if it was determined that TVA had the right of eminent domain in Union County, that it could not transfer that right to a private company, specifically American Commercial Lines. The thirteen property owners involved included Matt Robinson, Sam S. Clements, John R. Allen, Henry Walker, Mrs. Ann Ward, James Brisby, Mrs. J.S. Byrne, Mrs. Frances Roberts, R.W. Roberts, Mrs. Sue Mary Wedding, Marshall Peak, Malcolm Wheatley, and John W. Willett. Judge Gordon ruled that their complaint was premature on 1 June 1970, since TVA had not yet actually filed any condemnation proceedings against these landowners. Nevertheless, by early June, in addition to the City of Morganfield, nine other property owners had already accepted offers for damages from TVA and were in the

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60 "Court rules for TVA in condemnation suit," *Union County Advocate*, 4 June 1970.

61 "IC appeals beltline decision by court," *Union County Advocate*, 16 July 1970.

62 *Illinois Central Railroad Company, Plaintiff-Appellant, v. Tennessee Valley Authority, American Commercial Barge Lines, and Cable Belt Conveyors, Inc., Defendants-Appellees. United States of America ex rel. Tennessee Valley Authority, Plaintiff-Appellee, v. A Conveyor Belt Easement and Right of Way Over Two Tracts of Land Containing a Total OF 0.26 acre, more or less, in Union County, Kentucky, Illinois Central Railroad Company, et al., Defendant-Appellant* 445 F.2d 308; 1971 U.S. App. LEXIS 9193 (Filed 30 June 1971).

process of transferring deeds to right-of-way.<sup>63</sup>

On 6 July 1970, TVA filed ten notices *lis pendens* in the Union County Court Clerk's office, essentially putting into the county record ten declarations of take that it was filing with the United States District Court at Owensboro, under its assumed power of eminent domain. The notices affected ten pieces of real estate totaling 49.46 acres; TVA estimated this land to be worth \$110,200. Most of the ten tracts of land had several owners.<sup>64</sup> In late July 1970, TVA filed an additional eight take notices for land planned for inclusion in the beltline system.<sup>65</sup> In early August, TVA filed two more take notices.<sup>66</sup>

By mid-December 1971, all of the landowners who were the defendants in the right-of-way case against TVA had won increases over the final offers made by TVA. A U.S. District Court jury in Owensboro heard three cases, while the others settled out of court. Bill Kurtz, of Kurtz Realty and Auction, gave testimony as an expert witness on behalf of the defendants. The values offered increased substantially, in the settlements both in and out of court. In the cases heard in court, Thomas Walker saw an increase from \$2,500 to \$5,000; James Fenwick from \$1,200 to \$2,000; and Eugene Ward from \$4,700 to \$7,000. In the settlements reached out of court, Matt Robinson won an increase from \$24,000 to \$35,000; Jess Farmer from \$16,350 to \$30,000; Malcolm Wheatley from \$15,875 to \$30,000; Thomas Wedding from \$12,000 to \$30,000; R.W. Roberts from \$23,750 to \$35,000; Marshall Peak from \$4,000 to \$6,000; Sam Clements

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63 "Court rules for TVA in condemnation suit," *Union County Advocate*, 4 June 1970.

64 "TVA files notices in belt line case," *Union County Advocate*, 9 July 1970.

65 "TVA notices given court," *Union County Advocate*, 30 July 1970.

66 "TVA files two 'take' notices," *Union County Advocate*, 13 August 1970.

from \$2,500 to \$12,000; James Brisby from \$10,350 to \$15,000; and John Allen from \$6,850 to \$9,200.<sup>67</sup> As is discussed later in this chapter, the fight for increased compensation for beltline easements was not simply money-grubbing; the beltline had a lasting and constantly evolving effect on the farm land and the people living near it, that could hardly be mitigated by moderate increases in the prices paid for the land.

Confusion and contention were also part of the process of acquiring land for the Ohio River terminus of the belt line. Plans for the Ohio River loading facility became public in late February 1970, when it was announced that construction on the dock would begin that May.<sup>68</sup> In March 1970, Pittsburgh-based Consolidation Coal, a major U.S. coal producer, paid \$160,170 for 371 acres of surface land in three tracts and close to the Ohio River near the mouth of Highland Creek, just north of Uniontown. TVA had been seeking to buy one of the tracts, 119 acres of river front land which had been owned by Nancy Biggs Dobbins of Waco, Texas, for construction of the loading dock at the end of the beltline. According to a Consolidation representative, the company did not have immediate plans for developing the site, but wanted to have the option of building a river shipping terminal there should it ever decide to mine the 21,000 acres of coal reserves in Henderson and Union Counties it had recently acquired in the vicinity of the riverfront property. These purchases were Consolidation's first activity in Union County. When TVA and its contractors initiated the planned construction on the site, Consolidation filed a complaint in Union Circuit Court that resulted in a restraining order against TVA,

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67 "12 in TVA belt line cases win increases," *Union County Advocate*, 16 December 1971.

68 "Loading Dock Work To Begin In May," *Union County Advocate*, 26 February 1970.

American Commercial Barge Lines, Dravo Corporation, and others. Consolidation quickly withdrew this complaint after filing, claiming that it had not known TVA was exercising its right of eminent domain and condemning the property.<sup>69</sup> By early June, TVA had filed a “declaration of taking” against Consolidation for 144 acres of the 371 it had acquired, primarily consisting of the former Dobbins land. At the same time, TVA filed for additional easement acreage in the river terminal area belonging to four other property owners, including Peggy Dean Aldrick et al., to whom TVA offered \$1,200 for 1.1 acres 1.5 miles southeast of the mouth of Highland Creek; D.B.Bromley and wife, \$3,900 for a tract northeast of Highland Creek; Margaret Flannery, \$4,000 for a 1.9 acre tract; and Robert Girtten and wife, \$5,750 for a 1.2 acre tract.<sup>70</sup> In late June, Consolidation followed the lead of Illinois Central by filing a suit in U.S. District Court at Owensboro, arguing that TVA did not have the right of eminent domain over the riverfront property since the land was outside of the boundary of the watershed of the Tennessee River that had been set by Congress.<sup>71</sup> This suit was not successful in stopping construction.

While the Camp Breckinridge mines and the belt line were being constructed to provide the raw materials for electricity, there were questions about how they would be powered. Both the Henderson-Union Rural Electric Cooperative (RECC) and Kentucky

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69 “Complaint Is Withdrawn By Coal Company,” *Union County Advocate*, 21 May 1970.

70 “TVA files belt line easements,” *Union County Advocate*, 11 June 1970.

71 “370,000 tons sand for P&M coal belt terminal,” *Union County Advocate*, 2 July 1970. Note: the P&M is an error made by the *Advocate*. P&M stands for Pittsburgh & Midway, a company not in anyway involved in the TVA-Peabody Camp mine development. This error was likely made because the company construction the dock facility, Dravo Corporation, was headquartered in Pittsburgh, as is mentioned in the article.

Utilities Company (KU) wanted to supply electricity to the mines in their service areas. KU already had the contract with Overland Coal Transportation Company to supply power to the beltline. While the mine entrance on the Logsdon Farm was already in RECC territory, the entrance on the Rhea farm was in KU territory; Peabody planned to construct a power line between the Logsdon site and the Rhea site to transmit the RECC power between the two mines. The Kentucky Public Service Commission (PSC) denied KU's request to serve the Rhea site and granted the RECC the right to serve both mines. The PSC justification was that the site of sale of electricity would actually be on the Logsdon site, served by RECC, since that is where the meter would be located, and that it was already a fairly common practice for mining operations to provide their own transmission lines for electricity between facilities.<sup>72</sup> When the PSC announced that RECC would power both mines, an editorial in the *Advocate* declared that “the flourishing coal industry was granted what amounts to a subsidy” by the decision. RECC could supply power to Peabody much more cheaply than Kentucky Utilities, because it could borrow money from the government at a much lower interest rate than the private company. The editorial argued that RECC had strayed from its original purpose of providing electricity to rural residents and farmers who would have been without it otherwise, and was now too focused on the industrial market.<sup>73</sup>

As the legal proceedings among landowners, TVA, and the various contractors

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<sup>72</sup> “RECC given okeh to serve Peabody mines at Breck,” *Union County Advocate*, 25 June 1970.

<sup>73</sup> “Subsidy for coal industry?” *Union County Advocate*, 25 June 1970. Rural electric cooperatives had been initially funded by loans from the Rural Electric Administration (REA), authorized during the New Deal era. The intention of the REA was to fund efforts to bring electricity to the nation's rural farmers to improve their quality of life and economic opportunities.



dragged on, planning for the beltline continued and its structure began to emerge on the landscape. Though the cable conveyor was typically referred to as a single 12.6 mile belt line, it was actually constructed in two parts. One section, 36-inches wide, ran 3.5 miles from Peabody Mine No. 2 to Peabody Mine No. 1. There, coal from Mine No. 1 joined the coal from Mine No. 2, and ran on a 42-inch wide belt for 9.1 miles to the river.<sup>74</sup> The *Advocate* provided near-weekly updates on its construction, frequently publishing photographs of newly installed concrete pier supports, setting up crossings over roads, and other phases of the construction.<sup>75</sup> Images from the construction of the belt line show it parting the landscape, creating a divide in the fields and forests which stretched toward the horizon. The construction of this beltline made a mark on Union County's landscape like no industrial development before it. Despite only being a few feet wide, its reach across and visibility from the highly traveled Highway 60, as well as other frequently used state and county roads, put it in the sight and consciousness of nearly everyone who lived in or traveled through the county.

Though the beltline received considerable attention for its length, the loading and dockage facility at its end was also a project of massive scale. The facility included a coal reclaimer which required a base 24 foot high and 400 feet wide by 1,650 feet long; the reclaimer was needed to receive the coal coming to the river via the belt line and reload it onto a short belt which would carry it to a barge loader. An early stage in the construction of the reclaimer base involved pumping 370,000 tons of sand and gravel

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74 "12.6 mile conveyor belt carries first 'test' coal," *Union County Advocate*, 30 September 1971.

75 Examples of images from the *Union County Advocate* found in papers from 23 July 1970, 17 September 1970, 18 March 1971.

from the Ohio River. Grant Construction Company, a subcontractor of Dravo Corporation of Pittsburgh, which had the contract for the dock and the base, used a dredge boat which connected to the base construction area with hundreds of feet of pipe. After the dredge was pumped into the base, settlement basins separated out the excess water, and it was returned to the river. The reclaimer had the potential to facilitate the loading of 5,500 tons, or one barge's worth of coal, per hour. The dock area had room for 20 barges, which were moved around by automatic barge shifters.<sup>76</sup>

In September 1971, Overland Coal Transportation Company, Cable Belt Conveyors Co., American Commercial Barge Lines, Inc., and Peabody began running test coal on the belt line in manual mode to assess its readiness for regular use. There was already a substantial pile of coal that had been mined from Peabody Camp No. 2 ready to test the belt line. Testing of the automatic control system began in mid-October. After the belt line and the loading dock system were cleared for operation, regular transportation of coal to the river via the belt line and loading of barges began. Within a few months, the camp mines had produced and the belt line had transported enough coal for the maintenance of a 270,000 ton stockpile at the riverfront dock.<sup>77</sup> When the river was high, as it was in late April 1972, and flooded the surrounding bottom land, the stockpile and dock area could be surrounded by water. It thus took on the appearance of a “black island” sitting in the Ohio.<sup>78</sup> By Fall 1976, the beltline had already transported 18

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76 “370,000 tons sand for P&M coal belt terminal,” *Union County Advocate*, 2 July 1970.

77 “12.6 mile conveyor belt carries first 'test' coal,” *Union County Advocate*, 30 December 1971.

78 Photo *Union County Advocate*, 27 April 1972.

million tons of coal from the Camp 1 and Camp 2 mines to the Ohio River.<sup>79</sup>

While the long TVA-Peabody belt line caused considerable kerfuffle in Union County, a coal truck controversy in the historic coal mining area of the county highlighted its potential benefits. In the winter of 1974-75, a proposed Ohio River coal loading dock at Caseyville received considerable opposition. Most of this opposition came from concern over coal trucks running between area mines on and around KY 109 and the river using KY1508, a narrow and winding road, and their possible interactions with school buses. Both the affected mines and the coal trucking company, Coal Dray Co., agreed not to run coal trucks on 1508 during times when school buses were collecting or depositing pupils.<sup>80</sup> Coal conveyor beltlines alleviated such controversies, as their fixed and established position on the landscape allowed them to transport coal at all times, regardless of surrounding activities.

### ***Also on the landscape***

The new mines, conveyor belt, and loading docks were not the only dramatic constructions on the landscape in and around Union County at this time. In 1965, the process of building a new lock and dam system on the Ohio River at Uniontown began; it was to replace an existing structure called “Dam 49.” Elements of the new facility included not only the locks, but also necessary dredging, an access road and a diversion channel. While the locks and gated section of the dam were not on the Union County

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<sup>79</sup> “Longest beltline to carry additional load soon,” *Union County Advocate*, 29 September 1976.

<sup>80</sup> “Trucks will stay off roads when buses are in the area,” *Union County Advocate*, 19 February 1975.

side of the river, instead extending between Wabash Island (which sits in the middle of the Ohio) and Indiana, a permanent, fixed weir extended between Wabash Island and the Kentucky side. During extremely high water, too high to allow the locks to function, boats could navigate over the weir, nearer to the Kentucky side. The new dam structure formed a “deeper, wider, and more stable pool” behind it, which allowed for increased efficiency of towboats moving barges up and down the river (in addition to the increased efficiency of larger, faster locks).<sup>81</sup>

In Spring 1971, the U.S. Corps of Engineers filed condemnation proceedings in U.S. District Court for the coal and other mineral rights on the 433.02 acre Wabash Island, after they had already obtained the surface acres as part of the construction of the new dam.<sup>82</sup> In addition to those of Wabash Island, many other Kentucky landowners were affected by the new dam. Periodic flooding of just over 4000 acres of land in Union and Henderson counties would occur as part of the operations of the new structure. Through its right of eminent domain, the U.S. Corps of Engineers had the power to acquire this land. Property owners were concerned both about the amounts that the Corps would evaluate and sell their land for and how new water levels and flooding would affect adjoining acreage that the Corps did not condemn. At a meeting in late July 1971, around 45 landowners received advice from farmers in other areas who had dealt with Corps condemnation due to dam building, such as those in Livingston County affected by the construction of Barkley Dam, and from others involved in appraisal appeals.<sup>83</sup>

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81 “1973 Completion Date For Uniontown Dam,” *Union County Advocate*, 30 October 1969.

82 “Corps files suit for mineral rights,” *Union County Advocate*, 4 March 1971.

83 “River farmers speculate on Corps' land offers,” *Union County Advocate*, 29 July 1971.

Yet again in the discourse surrounding these condemnation proceedings are echoes of Camp Breckinridge. An editorial in the *Advocate* in July 1971 expressed the feelings of many in Union County still reeling from both the Camp Breckinridge and TVA belt line and mine entrance controversies:

While it is possible that some landowners in any government take-over may have an exaggerated opinion as to the value of their property, it is our observation that too often a government agency, whether the Corps of Engineers or some other agency, has but one objective—to buy the land as cheap as possible.

The editorial also brought to the forefront the question of determining what was the best for public versus private interests. The dam was being constructed, and the land flooded, so that navigation would be easier for barges traveling up and down the Ohio River. As the editorial noted, these barge lines were not paying fees for using the locks, being “furnished without cost a free right of way and no questions asked.” Noting that barge lines ran very profitable businesses through their transportation of goods, the editorial pointed out that “it would seem that federal agencies should be as anxious to aid helpless landowners as it is to aid the shipping industry.” Much as it had in the case of the decision to allow Peabody Coal to purchase power from a rural electric cooperative, the *Advocate* argued that the government was providing an indirect subsidy to a private company. The editorial asserted that the Corps, as well as any other government agency acquiring private property, should have the primary objective of paying fair prices that included not only the market value of the land itself, but also the cost of relocation and other factors.<sup>84</sup> For the sake of Union Countians, the *Advocate* hoped that 30 years after

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<sup>84</sup> “Federal land acquisition” (editorial), *Union County Advocate*, 29 July 1971,

the Camp Breckinridge land acquisition, the U.S. government would have improved its practices.

The construction of the dam also became intertwined with the construction of the TVA-Peabody coal loading dock facility. Despite its massive scale, since the facility was both on river-bordering lands and on the river itself, it was sensitive to the increased flooding caused by the dam. In order to guarantee that there would always be land access to the loading dock, the Overland Coal Company worked in conjunction with the Union County Road Department to raise the level of the approach road above the anticipated flood heights. They also raised the height of a bridge over Highland Creek, which would also have higher flood levels, on the road.<sup>85</sup>

A side effect of the Corps of Engineers needing to acquire the land that would suffer increased flood susceptibility due to the dam was the creation of a new wildlife management area. The Corps of Engineers cooperated with the National Audubon Society, Indiana, and Kentucky to create the area, for both general wildlife habitat, and particularly to support waterfowl populations. In Kentucky, 4,085 acres around Highland Creek, lying in both Union and Henderson Counties, became several units of the eastern portion of the Sloughs Wildlife Management area.<sup>86</sup> Despite this benefit to wildlife conservation, and despite some farmers being able to continue raising crops as renters on land in the Sloughs as part of its wildlife management, there was resentment in Union County at yet more privately-owned land being claimed by a government agency through

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85 "Country's longest cable conveyor transports 'test' coal from Peabody mines to river loading facility" (photos), *Union County Advocate*, 30 September 1971.

86 "6,300-acre wildlife area planned along Ohio River," *Union County Advocate*, 1 July 1971.

eminent domain.

The 1960s and early 1970s brought an era of dramatic change in agriculture throughout the United States. The policies of Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz abetted the ongoing trends toward larger farms, expanded monocropping, and technological enhancements in agricultural efficiency and productivity.<sup>87</sup> These trends were somewhat manifested in the Union County agricultural landscape. Increases in farm size in the county were supported by the Camp Breckinridge auction, and corn had already been king in the county for several years. Union County farmers were quick to adopt new seed and chemical technologies as they became available, and agribusinesses thrived in all corners of the county. At the level at which agricultural infrastructure most resembled industrial infrastructure, this was a period of substantial growth in scale. In 1964, Wabash Elevator Company at Uniontown had an aging elevator and two cribs for the storage of corn still on the ear; the total storage capacity of the elevator was 6,000-7,000 bushels. In June 1971, the company completed installation of two 100,000 bushel grain bins, which along with other recent construction increased the total storage capacity of the elevator to 625,000 bushels.<sup>88</sup> In February 1975, Wabash gained approval from the U.S. Corps of Engineers to construct a loading dock for grain on the Ohio River at Uniontown. Wabash had been using the railroad spur to Uniontown to transport grain to regional markets, but uncertainty about the future of the county's rail service motivated them to seek other transport options.<sup>89</sup> On 11 September 1975, after the 10-hour loading

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<sup>87</sup> Gardner, *American Agriculture*.

<sup>88</sup> Photo caption, *Union County Advocate*, June 1971.

<sup>89</sup> "Loading dock gets approval," *Union County Advocate*, 12 February 1975.

process for 50,359 bushels of wheat, the first river shipment of grain left the new facility, destined for New Orleans. This was the first grain shipped by river from Uniontown since the early 1900s.<sup>90</sup> The construction of the Uniontown grain loading dock, and expansion of the elevator storage facilities, placed the main exit points of corn and coal from the county side-by-side, as the terminus of the beltline and coal storage and loading facility was only a few barge-lengths down the banks of the Ohio River from the grain dock and a short overland walk from the elevator.

The aggregate efforts of individual farmers also resulted in significant landscape changes. On farms across the county, landowners moved soil by the ton from high to low areas with land levelers cut miles of new drainage and diversion ditches to manage water runoff.<sup>91</sup> In late spring 1971, farmers began installing plastic drain pipe on their land, typically thousands of feet at a time, in addition to continuing to use tile made of concrete or clay.<sup>92</sup> By the fall of 1971, Union County farmers had constructed 2.5 million feet of open channels which served as outlets for smaller in-field waterways and the over 8 million feet of tile drains that had been installed. As the Union County Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors noted in their 1971 Annual Report, “It would be hard to visualize what Union County would be like today without the extensive drainage program that has been developed through cooperative efforts over the past 40 years. It certainly would not be listed as one of the top agriculture counties of the state

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90 “Grain shipment via the Ohio River revived at Uniontown” (photo caption), *Union County Advocate*, 17 September 1975. Though Wabash Company officials acknowledged it was considerably cheaper to ship grain via the river, they planned to continue using rail service to ship white corn.

91 e.g. Roy Graff, “Breck Area Farms Being Improved,” *Union County Advocate*, 26 June 1969.

92 Roy Graff, “First Plastic Tile Installed in County,” *Union County Advocate*, 3 June 1971.



helping to produce the food needed for our ever increasing population.”<sup>93</sup> Done largely in the name of conservation, this drainage work responded to features of the land created both by geologic and environmental processes over time and earlier farming practices, and significantly shaped the hybrid energy landscape.

### ***An active part of the landscape***

After its construction, the 12.6 mile TVA-Peabody coal conveyor belt line was not an inert fixture on the landscape. Both through its use, and as it aged, the belt line continued to affect the land and the people around it. Though the farmers and other landowners had come to an agreement with TVA on compensation for the lands the belt line crossed, the line's ongoing presence required ongoing actions and negotiations.

Eddie Espy and his wife Judy own and farm land crossed by the belt line. As described in the quote that opens this chapter, Eddie's grandparents had been forced to move from an earlier farm due to the construction of Camp Breckinridge. In 2009, 36 years after the belt line entered full operation, and nearly 20 years after its 17-year anticipated use-life had expired, the Espys were still negotiating the belt line's presence on the landscape in their farming operations. From the time of its construction, the belt line changed the way the Espy family farmed. Following a near-straight line route from the camp mines to the river, the belt line cut grain and pasture fields in two. The division of fields had two results. In some fields, corners of land too small to plant in crops were

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93 “Union County Has 8 Million Lineal Feet of Tile Drains,” *Union County Advocate*, 16 September 1971. This article was one in a series that reprinted portions of the Soil and Water Conservation District's Annual Report.

separated from the main field, and hence lost to production. In other fields, both sides of the cut were still cropable, but no longer in the row patterns that had been used before. On the Espys' land, the builders of the belt line in the early 1970s provided a few elevated segments which machines could cross under and a few segments in which a mound of earth was used to cover the belt line, providing a drive-over area (Figure 4.1). These have become more difficult for the farmers to use through the decades, as farm machinery has dramatically increased in size and the crossings are often no longer large enough to allow passage of the equipment. In fields where the belt line is not crossable, farmers often have to drive their machinery a considerable distance to the nearest crossing point or road, consuming both time and fuel.



*Figure 3.1: Small equipment crossing over belt line on Espy farm.*

The Espys have also experienced ongoing issues with localized flooding and drainage of their fields, resulting from the concrete structures used to support the belt line. The Espys are also constantly confronted with the belt line's noise, coal dust, and coal spillage, which, though more annoying than farm-altering, have become worse as it has aged.<sup>94</sup>

The belt line has also been at the center of several labor disputes. On 6 December 1977, a general United Mine Workers (UMW) strike began after unsuccessful attempts to negotiate a replacement contract for the one that expired that day between the UMW and Bituminous Coal Operators Association (BCOA). Roughly 3,000 Union County miners were among the 130,000 striking nationally.<sup>95</sup> Though the general strike was among the longest in UMW history, most of the miners went back to work in late March.<sup>96</sup> The 17 UMW members who worked for Overland Coal Transportation, however, remained on strike for several additional weeks in order to complete negotiations with Overland, which was not an official member of the BCOA and had waived on whether or not it honored BCOA agreements. During this additional strike time, the coal conveyor belt remained idle, which forced the Peabody Camp Mines 1, 2, and 11 to stockpile their coal at the mine sites, rather than transport it to the river, where the loading facility was also quiet as there was no coal for barges to haul.<sup>97</sup>

In late March 1980, American Commercial Terminals of Jeffersonville, IN, questioned the authority of the United Mine Workers to serve as the bargaining agent for

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94 Eddie and Judy Espy, conversation with the author on their farm in Union County, 8 March 2009. Notes in author's possession.

95 "Mine strike is on for December 6<sup>th</sup>," *Union County Advocate*, 30 November 1977.

96 "Miners work – for one day," *Union County Advocate*, 29 March 1978.

97 "OCT strike now 135 days old," *Union County Advocate*, 19 April 1978.

workers at its St. Louis river terminal, one of five it operated. Belt line operator Overland Transportation, Inc., was a subsidiary of American Commercial Terminals. When workers in St. Louis began striking, picket lines spread to Overland's facility in Union County. The 17 Overland workers there honored the picket line, and the belt shut down. During the first week in April, Peabody had to idle the Camp 11 mine after it ran out of storage space for coal that was mined but could not be moved to the river on the belt.<sup>98</sup> The Overland employees returned to work on 10 April, after the belt had been shut down for two weeks; however, the following afternoon, lightening struck a large motor in Uniontown that powered the belt, once again shutting it down, this time for five days, and affecting mine activity.<sup>99</sup>

On 16 July 1980, picketers from the Seafarers International Union arrived at the Overland offices in Union County. Union employees from outside of the county began manning a 24 hour picket line, which the local Overland employees honored. Though roughly 1,000 feet of the belt were vandalized by cutting during the first two weeks of strike, the belt only went out of service for a few days, as supervisory personnel continued to operate it part-time while the workers were on strike.<sup>100</sup> By the time the strike had been in effect for one month, however, the partial belt line operation could no longer keep up with the rate of production of the Camp 1, 2, and 11 mines, and a shortage of barges on the Ohio developed. Peabody ran out of stockpiling space and had to idle

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98 "Camp 1 and 2 safe this week," *Union County Advocate*, 9 April 1980.

99 "Overland belt moves, lightning [sic] knocks it out," *Union County Advocate*, 16 April 1980.

100 "FBI may enter Overland Coal belt line vandalism inquiry," *Union County Advocate*, 6 August 1980.

production at the three mines, forcing its 1,500 miners to take unpaid vacations.<sup>101</sup> As a crucial part of the system for coal's extraction from the county, the belt line infrastructure had the power to bring the whole mining process to a halt.

At times, mining shut downs were caused by issues at the end of the belt line, rather than on the beltline itself. The very seasonal problems that had led late nineteenth century Union County mining interests to build railroads still continued to hamper river traffic—ice. While dams and associated river management structures had dramatically improved the year-round navigability of the river, the problem of ice in the winter still had the power to hamper transportation of coal and other commodities. In January 1977, for example, most of the barges on much of the Ohio River were “immobilized like statues” in the ice. Around Uniontown, boats were moving, but their movement was restricted, due to 5-inch-thick ice stretching across the river, and they could not get far down or upriver. Though the TVA-Peabody coal conveyor belt could still function, the river loading facility at Uniontown quickly ran out of space to stockpile the coal, and extracted coal had to be stockpiled at the mine site. At other mines, the belt line succumbed to the weather. Rollers froze on the belt line connecting Hamilton 2 with Hamilton 1, hampering the mine's ability to produce coal.<sup>102</sup> The condition of the river led to the complete shut down of Island Creek's Ohio #11 mine on 25 January 1977, as barges could not reach the loading dock, and the stockpile was filled to its capacity of 200,000 tons of coal. The mine remained closed for over three weeks due to the

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101 “1,500 miners are idled by strike against Overland,” *Union County Advocate*, 13 August 2013.

102 “Ohio River traffic problems mount,” *Union County Advocate*, 19 January 1977.

weather.<sup>103</sup>

### ***The camp mining complex grows***

The Camp Breckinridge area mining complex continued to grow over time. In mid-1975, preparations began for the construction of a Peabody mine to extract coal from the No. 11 seam; the mine was located roughly between the Peabody 1 and Peabody 2 mines. This mine required over 800 acres of surface land, on acreage owned by the Hagedorns and by Clyde Reed, that had been part of the camp. The No. 11 coal necessitated the unusually large acreage because it had to be cleaned before commercial use, so a washing plant had to be constructed, as well as five dams to harness water within the 800-plus acres. The new facility connected via cross belt to the existing 12.6 mile belt line that led to the Ohio River.<sup>104</sup> A local firm, Gunter-Nash Mining Construction Company, of Providence in neighboring Webster County, won the contract for constructing the slope, while a Boonville, Indiana, company performed the grading. The No. 11 seam at this site contained roughly 35 million tons of coal. TVA used its bonding authority to finance the mine, as it could borrow the necessary \$23 million more cheaply than Peabody. The agreement between TVA and Peabody for this No. 11 mine also called for TVA to pay the entire cost of operating the mine, including approximate \$10 million in annual labor cost. The rationale was that financing its own coal production

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<sup>103</sup> "248 miners off work," *Union County Advocate*, 9 February 1977.

<sup>104</sup> "Construction on new Breck area mine may begin in mid-July," *Union County Advocate*, 18 June 1975.

would allow TVA to obtain coal at well below the market price.<sup>105</sup>

In the late 1970s, the Environmental Protection Agency implemented pollution control programs that limited the amount of sulfur and other chemicals that power plants could release as part of their emissions. Under the new regulations, the coal mined in Camp 1 and Camp 2 had to be washed, in addition to the coal coming from the new Camp No. 11 seam mine. When production at the No. 11 mine reached capacity, its washing plant would not have the capacity to process the coal from the other Camp mines.

After abandoning a plan to transport Camp 1 and Camp 2 coal to a processing plant in Muhlenberg County for washing before it was sent to TVA's Cumberland Steam Plant, TVA announced in May 1978 that it planned to construct a new coal washing plant in Union County.<sup>106</sup> This plant would cost \$50 million and would require 993 acres of land near Waverly, which happened to be high-quality farm land. The *Advocate* pointed out the significance of the loss of this land, noting that “of even greater importance” to Union Countians than increased electric rates resulting from the cost of building such washing plants was the removal of the “prime farm land from a county noted for its agriculture industry.” The *Advocate* noted that the payments TVA made in lieu of taxes still did not make up for the removal of the farm land, ending the editorial by stating:

Environmental protection may be well intentioned, but we wonder if the longevity of life it is supposed to provide is worth the price. In the local situation, because

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<sup>105</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority, *Power Annual Report 1975*.

<sup>106</sup> “Camp No. 11 to wash coal for Peabody,” *Union County Advocate*, 17 May 1978; “TVA, Peabody seek land for prep plant,” *Union County Advocate*, 31 May 1978.

of EPA, we gain nothing, but lose a lot. There is simply no “new” farm land.<sup>107</sup>

The legacy of appropriation of large acreages of farmland in Union County established by Camp Breckinridge left little tolerance for additional takings that were either directly or indirectly the result of government mandates. Effects on air quality from emissions generated at a plant over 100 miles away were of far less immediate concern than the loss of yet more of Union County's best crop acres.

Though they questioned the need for taking high quality farm land in the name of air quality, Union Countians were also concerned about the negative environmental impacts that the environment-saving washing plant might have locally. The Union County Planning Commission expressed multiple concerns to the Kentucky Department for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, and asked for assistance in addressing those concerns. The Planning Commission particularly inquired about concerns over the effects on nearby highly productive farm land and future crop yields of water runoff from the plant potentially containing minerals, and how this runoff could effect the groundwater supply, the water table, and the watershed basin as a whole.<sup>108</sup>

More acutely than the county as a whole, the owners of the farm land being taken for the washing plant felt the loss. The Sprague Brothers owned the bulk of the desired property, 815 acres, which they had purchased at the GSA auction of Camp Breckenridge lands in 1966. Though the Spragues had paid around \$400 an acre for the land, they had since invested thousands more in the land for drainage tiling and other improvements.<sup>109</sup>

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107 “EPA is expensive” (editorial), *Union County Advocate*, 7 June 1978.

108 “UCPC expressed concern about prep plant,” *Union County Advocate*, 21 June 1978.

109 “TVA, Peabody seek land for prep plant,” *Union County Advocate*, 31 May 1978.



After rejecting TVA's initial offer of around \$2,500 per acre, weeks of negotiations resulted in Sprague Brothers agreeing to sell the land to TVA for about \$2,672 an acre, or \$2,187,000 total.<sup>110</sup> As part of their agreement, the Spragues kept farming the land until it was needed by TVA.<sup>111</sup> Two other landowners held the remaining acreage: Richard Maloney owned 72.3 acres of the desired land, and W.J. Rhea held 51.6. Negotiations over their land did not yield any agreement, and TVA sued for condemnation against both landowners in June 1978. A few weeks before the suits were scheduled to come to trial, TVA settled with both Maloney and Rhea in May 1979. TVA paid both of the landowners slightly more than they had initially been offered. Maloney received \$176,350, or about \$2,440 per acre for the land, in addition to \$22,359 in damages to compensate for the destruction of 60 acres of corn crop by construction crews in Fall 1978. Rhea received \$123,950, or about \$2,400 per acre, plus \$15,120 in damages for 36 acres of destroyed soybean crop.<sup>112</sup>

Construction on the washing plant began in Fall 1978. By mid-1979, the growing plant had become a striking presence on the landscape, with frameworks for buildings reaching upward and bases for three of the five planned coal storage silos emerging out of the ground.<sup>113</sup> Peabody had planned to build 266 foot tall silos, but the Kentucky Airport Zoning Commission ruled in late July 1979, after three were under construction, that they could not be more than 189 feet tall, in part due to their proximity to the Morganfield

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110 "TVA land suits settled out of court," *Union County Advocate*, 9 May 1978.

111 "\$2 million paid by TVA for Sprague Bros. Land," *Union County Advocate*, 12 July 1978.

112 "TVA land suits settled out of court," *Union County Advocate*, 9 May 1978.

113 "\$50 million washing plant means cleaner coal," *Union County Advocate*, 11 July 1979.

airport.<sup>114</sup> This ruling halted construction on the silos for several weeks in August and September, until the State Transportation Secretary voted to allow the higher silos, provided they were adequately marked and lighted to minimize the potential for hazardous encounters.<sup>115</sup> By mid-October 1979, two of the silos were approaching their full height.<sup>116</sup>

Construction on the washing plant continued through 1980, and by early spring 1981, Peabody and TVA were beginning testing operations on the facility. In order to reduce the sulfur content of coal mined at Camp 1 and Camp 2, the plant was constructed to use a heavy media process to wash the coal. In this process, the coal is first crushed and then sifted so that all pieces larger than 3/8" fall into a container holding a solution of iron oxide and water. The clean coal floats, while unwanted waste particles from the coal sink and can be removed. The smaller pieces are also put into an iron oxide and water, but in a cyclone separator, which divides the clean coal from the waste using rotation and gravity. The plant was designed with the capacity to clean roughly 2,000 tons of coal per hour, which exceeded the maximum production capacity of the Camp 1 and 2 mines at the time it was built, and would be ample to handle the output of another mine constructed in the future.<sup>117</sup> By March 1981, the plant was in operation.<sup>118</sup>

While clean coal left the site of the washing plant and traveled across the belt line

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114 "Silo height ruling: Peabody lacks answer," *Union County Advocate*, 1 August 1979.

115 "Split vote allows Peabody to continue plant construction," *Union County Advocate*, 26 September 1979.

116 Photo, *Union County Advocate*, 17 October 1979.

117 "TVA's \$46 million plant paves way for cleaner coal," *Union County Advocate*, 14 January 1981.

118 "Report indicates TVA wasting \$50 million a year," *Union County Advocate*, 18 March 1981.

to the Ohio River, the wastes left over from cleaning that coal remained in Union County. A substantial part of the nearly 1,000 acres acquired for the washing plant has been and continues to be used to store and manage the solid and liquid waste from the washing process. Though most of the land around the plant is considered gently rolling, the piles of waste material rise above the surrounding slopes, and tower above the adjacent corn fields. EPA-mandated efforts to cover these waste hills, “gob piles” in the local parlance, have been in place since the 1990s, but as the washing plant has been brought into service for new mining activity, the need for waste storage has grown, and more waste has been piled on top of areas of fledgling grasses. The washing plant grounds also include a number of ground-level sediment retention ponds and a water treatment plant to assist in managing the waste liquid.<sup>119</sup>

The washing plant and its hills and ponds of waste from have not only been part of the environmental change in the surrounding landscape, but also have become a significant part of the visual experience of the Union County landscape. In the case of the gob piles, this visual experience can be confusing. Viewed from a distance, they could conceivably be a part of the rolling landscape, but when viewed from within a mile their stark contrast to the surrounding crop fields becomes evident through their color, shape, and texture. The structures of the washing plant itself are also visually stark and visually confusing. Soon after the plant had begun normal operations, in July 1981, the *Advocate* published a photo that juxtaposed a farmer's large assembly of grain storage

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119 I had the opportunity to closely observe the gob piles and retaining ponds in August 2013, when I visited lands farmed by Willard Greenwell that are near coal operations.

bins and elevator structures with the coal storage silos at the washing plant, with the lead off to the caption stating, “NEIGHBORS.” The photo had not been doctored, but the photographer had been standing at a vantage point that placed the grain bins in the foreground, making them seem larger in comparison to the coal silos than they actually are, and that made the bins and silos appear to be within mere feet of each other, while they were in actuality up to a mile apart. Despite its calculated perspective, the juxtaposition of farming infrastructure was (and is) a part of the visual experience of the Union County landscape, and this photo demonstrated that. Without the caption, which went on to explain that the photo was showing both corn and coal infrastructure, the viewer could have easily thought the photo was depicting two aspects of agricultural production—the on-farm storage bin, and the large concrete grain storage silos often found at major grain elevators, including ones where Union County farmers deliver and sell their corn.

### ***Conclusion***

While coal conveyor belt lines were not new to Union County in the late 1960s, the scale of the TVA-Peabody line was not only novel for Western Kentucky, but for the coal-producing world. The 12.6 mile belt line was necessitated by the construction of the TVA-Peabody mines, which were themselves in part side effects of Camp Breckenridge. The construction and operation of the belt line, and the mines it served, had ripples across the Union County agricultural landscape and among the county's

population. Once the remarkable infrastructure of the TVA-Peabody beltline was in place, it established the foundation for belt line transportation as the dominant form of coal transportation in the county, and the only form in the central and northern parts of the county. The existence of a long belt line from mines to the river facilitated the expansion of the line transportation network attached to it, as new mines were connected to the original line by new lines spoke-ing out from it. The line's long-term functionality also demonstrated to administrators of new, entirely unrelated mines in the county the benefits of using multi-mile belt lines to move their coal, which would lead to increased presence of the structures on the landscape in subsequent decades, as is discussed in Chapter 6.

While beltlines virtually eliminated problems for the general public due to coal transportation, such as coal truck traffic and delays at railroad crossings, the belt lines' departure from existing and multipurpose routes of transportation affected the agricultural landscape. Farmers, many of whom had been or had family members who had been involved in the Camp Breckinridge land acquisition, were again asked to give up their land “for the public good” in the construction of the TVA-Peabody line. As is discussed in Chapter 6, with the construction of more belt lines, the mining companies and members of the agricultural community became more practiced and adept at negotiating the landscape.

## ***Chapter 5: Reconciling Identities—Corn and Coal in Celebration and Naming***

On Friday, 18 September 2009, hundreds of people gathered under a huge tent just outside of Uniontown. The occasion was the dedication of the new River View Coal mine, owned by Alliance Resource Partners, LLC. While the mine opening itself was an attraction—the \$270 million construction had already created 150 jobs and was slated to employ 600 people by the following summer—the crowd grew because of the presence of Kentucky celebrities. Governor Steve Beshear was in attendance for the ribbon-cutting ceremony, but an even bigger crowd-drawing attendee was recently-appointed University of Kentucky Wildcats basketball coach, John Calipari.<sup>1</sup>

With the opening of such a potential economic boon to Union County and Western Kentucky, the commentary that day was of course celebratory of the mine and the coal industry as a whole. Union County Judge Executive Jody Jenkins (whose dad had both been a coal miner and held the same elected position) observed, “It’s an opportunity for Union County that’s second to none.” Jenkins heralded the benefits that such a large mining development with so many high-paying jobs would have for the county, and for providing opportunities for miners whose families lived in Union County but who had been commuting 50-plus miles to work in other Alliance mines to begin or return to working in the county. Notably, both the Alliance Resource Partners executive vice president Charlie Wesley and River View General Manager Heath Lovell are Union

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1 Chuck Stinnett, “Dignitaries celebrate new mine: Gov. Beshear and U.K. Coach Calipari attend ceremony,” *Henderson Gleaner*, 18 September 2009. Available online at <http://www.courierpress.com/news/2009/sep/18/dignitaries-celebrate-new-mine/>. Accessed 2 September 2013.

County natives.

In his comments at the ceremony, Governor Beshear challenged environmental criticisms of the coal industry: “We’re working hard to develop clean coal technology. There’s no reason we cannot be good stewards of the environment and be top producers of energy in the country.” Joe Craft, CEO of Alliance, also addressed criticisms of the coal industry, stating in his speech, “I believe in the coal business. It makes me agitated that we are not appreciated.” Craft also emphasized the direct and indirect monetary impact that the mine was having. Specifically concerning the \$270 River View Mine, he asserted, “There’s been no investment in the state of Kentucky under Gov. Beshear that even approaches it.” He asserted that “We’re going to be here a long time and we’ll be a big taxpayer,” mentioning the \$70 million in annual taxes that Alliance would be paying from its six Kentucky mines once the River View mine reached full production.<sup>2</sup>

Coach Calipari made a point of identifying himself with the coal industry on the day of the dedication. In the parlance of a regional newspaper, Pennsylvania-native Calipari “explained his appearance” by stating, “My grandfather was a coal miner.” Calipari said that he wanted “to go underground” to see a working mine, which he did on the day of the ceremony at River View. In a comparison that he would come to use frequently in his time coaching at Kentucky, he reported being inspired by the teamwork and attention to safety of the mine manager and miners, a direct parallel to how a coach and players worked together on a highly successful college basketball team.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Stinnett, “Dignitaries celebrate.”

<sup>3</sup> Stinnett, “Dignitaries celebrate.”

By 2012, River View mine had taken Union County from being one of the top coal-producing counties in Kentucky to *the* top coal-producing county, at the same time as the county maintained its long-held status as the top corn-producing county. The dedication of the River View mine was significant not only for the economic impact or the change the mine had effected on the landscape (the latter is addressed in Chapter 6), but also for its representation of two partnerships related to the cultural identity of both Union County and Kentucky. For one, River View would become intensely involved in the general Union County community and with certain aspects of the Union County agricultural community, perhaps more than any other coal company in the county's history had been. One of these aspects is the Union County Corn Festival, an annual event that celebrates the non-coal half of the county's economy. The River View mine opening also signaled that Coach Calipari had already developed a strong relationship with Joe Craft, that would involve not only Calipari's public support of the coal industry in Kentucky, but also Craft's continuing financial support of the University of Kentucky men's basketball program.

Both coal mining and agriculture have long histories in Union County, and in Kentucky, and the groups involved in each have long traditions of cultural practices and performance of their identities. This chapter focuses on two expressions of identity, one local to Union County, and one at the Kentucky-wide level. Both the Corn Festival and the alliance between the coal industry and UK basketball indicate how the economic endeavors of agriculture and mining play key roles in establishing place and community



identities. The two events demonstrate both negotiation and contention in how agricultural and mining identities may be performed and expressed.

### ***The Union County Corn Festival***

After a drizzly, overcast morning on Saturday, 16 September 2011, the sun filled the sky in the hours before the parade of the 38<sup>th</sup> annual Union County Corn Festival in Morganfield. Crowds had started assembling in front of the courthouse and up and down Main Street at 9am. By 1pm, the floats, marching bands, dance teams, costumed historical figures, antique cars, and princess-carrying convertibles had filled the park at one end of town, lining up in preparation for the parade's start. At 2pm on the dot, the parade began, and the crowd of thousands craned their necks to watch the passing show and clamored to catch the candy that most float riders were tossing. In addition to the floats, local youth, and festival royalty, a 1958 corn picker and battalion of antique tractors graced the parade route, and a speedy single-seat ethanol-powered cornmobile darted in and out of the line. For nearly an hour, the parade continued through downtown Morganfield, among a crowd that was almost certainly larger than the just over 3000-person population of the small city.

While Union County had held an annual agricultural fair most summers since the early 1900s, the first Corn Festival celebration was held on 11-12 October 1974 in Morganfield, the county seat and near geographical center of the county. Even before the event actually occurred, the organizers and local media assumed that it would catch on,

referring to it as the “first annual” Corn Festival.<sup>4</sup> The Union County *Advocate* newspaper credited Jaycees Exalted Rooster Dr. H.M. (Bo) Smith with the idea for the festival; it is worth noting that, though he was not mentioned by the newspaper, the president of the Jaycees at the time of planning the first festival was Eddie Espy, a prominent corn grower in the county. The stated purpose of the first corn festival was “to commemorate the corn industry in Union County.” The *Advocate* gave the estimated value of the county’s crop in 1974 to be an impressive \$15 million.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to typical American festival elements of carnival rides and a parade, the first Corn Festival included many corn-themed activities. There were opportunities to compete in contests for the best corn recipe, fastest corn shucking, and closest guess to the number of corn kernels in a jar. The standard festival fundraiser of “arresting” attendees and having them garner donations to pay their “bail” was centered around a corn crib jail. The Union County High football team played Caldwell County in the Corn Bowl on Friday night, which coincided with the school’s homecoming activities. The featured foods at the festival were also representative of the exalted crop: corn on the cob was trumped as the premiere food to consume during the weekend, and Jaycees sales of popcorn helped finance the festival activities, rounding out the financial support provided by local agribusinesses and agricultural associations.<sup>6</sup>

In 1975, though the core of the Corn Festival was held Friday and Saturday,

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4 “Corn Festival Taking Shape,” *Union County Advocate*, 18 September 1974.

5 “Corn Festival Planners Announce Varied Events,” *Union County Advocate*, 26 June 1974.

6 “Corn Festival Taking Shape,” *Union County Advocate*, 18 Sept 1974; “Corn Festival Planners Announce Varied Events” *Union County Advocate*, 26 June 1974.

September 26 and 27, activities under its umbrella went on for weeks before. As the Jaycees were also sponsoring the Junior Miss contest, the winner was deemed the “Corn Festival Junior Miss,” with a reign that extended during the days of the festival (After the festival, she returned to just being “Junior Miss.”). A tennis tournament, trail ride, and billiards tournament were also underway before the main festival weekend. During the festival, events included a carnival, washer and horseshoe pitching, a tobacco spitting contest, chicken flying contest, and of course the parade, which included antique tractors, antique cars, decorated bicycles, historical reenactment floats, and a float from the Union County Pork Producers.<sup>7</sup> The estimated attendance for the 1975 festival was between 8,000 and 10,000. In 1976, the festival added a frog jumping contest and a John Henry Steel Driving Contest, “a test of speed and strength in the tradition of the old railroad workers who helped build the nation.” The parade included Eugene Bickett’s steam engine thrashing machine.<sup>8</sup> In its coverage of events, the *Advocate* played on the corn festival in its headlines, titling the post-festival photo essay “Cornucopia of fun,” and summarizing the article on the Corn Bowl as “Braves Shuck Daviess in Corn Bowl.”<sup>9</sup>

As predicted, the festival did catch on and continue, and by its ninth year, in 1982, festival organizers began giving the event a theme. That year’s theme was “Give Peace A Chance”; its choice was given a convoluted explanation involving the John Lennon song and “Billy Jack” movies. In 1983, the festival theme was based on the then-popular song

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7 “Corn Festival events already underway here,” *Union County Advocate*, 17 September 1975; “Corn Festival 1975” (photo collage), *Union County Advocate*, 1 October 1975.

8 “Corn Festival offers full schedule,” *Union County Advocate*, 8 September 1976.

9 “Braves Shuck Daviess in Corn Bowl,” *Union County Advocate*, 4 October 1978.

Hank Williams, Jr., “A Country Boy Can Survive.” More common in subsequent years have been corn-centered themes, including “Corn Is King” in both 1990 and 1993, “Field of Dreams” in 1994, “Corn, Food of Champions” in 1996, “Corn, A Five Star Kernel” in 1997, “Corn, A Versatile Crop” in 1998, “Corn Festival Homecoming” in 1999, “Corn Festival 2000,” “Corn is A-maize-ing” in 2002, and “Corn: Changing the World of Energy” in 2006.

The Corn Festival events have also gone through phases over time. Corn shucking and corn spitting continued in the 1980s, along with chicken flying contests involving those feathered consumers of ground corn. Non-corn-centric events also continued, including a 5k run, arm wrestling and bench press contests, and the longstanding tradition of the trail horse ride. Some years also brought tricycle and Big Wheel races for the little ones. By 1986, there was a freestanding “Miss Corn Festival” pageant, with blue jean and formal wear rounds.<sup>10</sup> The 1986 festival also introduced the Bobby Knight Chair Tossing Contest, designed to mock the frequent on-court outbursts of the coach of the Indiana University men's basketball team, longstanding rivals of the University of Kentucky team, the importance of which to the people of the Commonwealth is covered later in this chapter.<sup>11</sup> Some of the rare negative media coverage of corn festival events occurred in 1981, when parade horses, revelers in the Bierstube beer garden, and local police had a melee, and in 1984 when there was disgruntlement over indignities suffered by the quail scrambled after by frenzied children

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10 “Miss Corn Festival new here this year,” *Union County Advocate*, 20 August 1986.

11 “Corn Festival's ready to pop,” *Union County Advocate*, 10 September 1986.

in the quail flying contest.<sup>12</sup>

In 1987, when the Jaycees were disbanding, the Morganfield Lions Club took over organization of the Corn Festival. Many who had been Jaycees were also involved in the Lions Club, and so there was substantial continuity in the event.<sup>13</sup> The Lions had also served country ham sandwiches each year at the festival since its beginning.<sup>14</sup> In the first year of their sponsorship, the Lions did add a few events, including a popcorn eating contest.<sup>15</sup>

The festival has continued to evolve, both as a community event, and in its celebration of corn, through the 2000s. One year a charity fundraiser associated with the festival involved populating Morganfield with decorated 3-foot-tall fiberglass corn cobs. County school and community groups painted and applied other media to the cobs based on different themes, resulting in a corn cob school bus and a Sponge Cob Square Pants, among others. The cobs were then auctioned to local businesses, some of whom continue to display them years later. The *Advocate* held a photo scavenger hunt for the decorated cobs in the weeks before the festival that year.<sup>16</sup> A popular recent addition to the corn festival lineup has been the Corn Dog Races, in which dachshunds and other small dogs run on a short, straw-bale-enclosed track and spectators place bets on which dogs will win, with proceeds benefitting the 4-H club.

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12 "Horsemen asked to move; police close bierstube," *Union County Advocate*, 23 September 1981; "Quails deserve better," *Union County Advocate*, 19 September 1984.

13 "Lions will sponsor Corn Festival," *Union County Advocate*, 15 July 1987.

14 "Lions getting ready for Jaycee Festival," *Union County Advocate*, 15 September 1982.

15 "Corn Festival will pop here this weekend," *Union County Advocate*, 16 September 1987.

16 I participated in the scavenger hunt.

Understanding the Corn Festival is an important part of understanding both Union County's agricultural identity and ultimately also the intersection of its coal and corn identities. The study of community festivals has been well-established as a path to understanding group identities and power struggles. As Frank Manning has argued, "Celebration is both culture and politics," and this is certainly the case for a festival feting a commodity that is at the center of a community's economy, as corn is in Union County.<sup>17</sup> Carole Farber has noted that performances such as festivals "provide ideal entrees into a community's symbolic, economic, social, and political life." Farber notes that "festivals are about identity, whether personal or social, and they are the context and the process of creating links between people in the community, as well as between the community and the wider national and cultural environment."<sup>18</sup> The Corn Festival only takes place one weekend out of the year, but the what and how of its celebration provide insight into how Union Countians view themselves and their county's position in Kentucky and beyond.

While the Corn Festival is put on by and for a community of people, it ultimately does celebrate an agricultural crop during the season of its reaping. In much of the recent (and not-so recent) scholarship on agricultural and harvest festivals in particular, the events are presented as in step with the realities of contemporary life in the communities that put them on. Roger Abrahams wrote (around the time that the Corn

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17 Frank Manning, *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives on Contemporary Cultural Performance* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Press, 1983), 16.

18 Carole Farber, "High Health and Happy: Ontario Mythology on Parade" in Manning, ed., *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives on Contemporary Cultural Performance* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Press, 1983), 33-34.

Festival was really gaining steam) about seasonal festivals that, “we have clung to them long after our close participation in the agricultural year has passed” and stated that “because we are no longer tied so firmly, both economically and physiologically, to the yearly passage, we have been able to translate festivals into special weekend events.”<sup>19</sup> Abrahams added that, “The festivals have become detached from our work,” with the consequence that “when the festival carries its release from the need to produce, it means something very different than it does to those who live by working with the earth and its productivity on a day-to-day basis.”<sup>20</sup> In his more recent writing on commodity celebrations in the U.S. South, such as a Tobacco and a Swine Festival, Rodger Brown positions them as “stubborn celebrations of an agricultural heritage that no longer matters for most people except in their remembered sense of place and community.” He notes that some festivals bearing a commodity's name no longer honor either the farmer or the crop, and even only marginally at best involve the crop as a symbol; the crop has become the center of the festival in name only. Brown says that such “festivals seem like fluorescent lichen growing on falling trees, celebrations of unstable illusions in the face of economic and cultural transformations.”<sup>21</sup> Brown slams county agents, county fairs and other harbingers of improved farm practices and productivity as having destroyed the culture and economy of rural America; thus, he says, these emptily-themed commodity

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19 Roger Abrahams, “The language of festivals: Celebrating the economy,” in Victor Turner, ed., *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), 162

20 Abrahams, “The language of festivals,” 163,

21 Rodger Brown, *Ghost Dancing on the Cracker Circuit: the Culture of Festivals in the American South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 50-51.

festivals intend to “repair what the modernization of agriculture accomplished.”<sup>22</sup>

While these assessments of harvest and agricultural commodity festivals may resonate in many places, they are off the mark in Union County. According to the Morganfield Lions Club, the festival exists to celebrate Union County's long-held status as the number one corn producing county in the state of Kentucky and the major economic role that row crop agriculture has in the county. As detailed in the introductory chapter, grain crops, corn dominant among them, have long been and continue to be the foundation of not just Union County's agricultural economy, but the county's economy as a whole. In a county of 15,000 people, with factory jobs declining from what little they ever were, the over \$100 million in gross cash receipts that grain production has been bringing to the county in recent years has a tremendous economic impact, its closest rival being coal. Furthermore, since nearly all Union County land is farmed by Union County residents, farm revenue returns to residents of the county; economic development analysts in Union County estimate that every dollar of farm income multiplies in the county economy five or six times. In addition to the county agribusinesses dealing in seed, fertilizer, and farm implement sales and repairs nearly every other business in the county, including banks, real estate agencies, cell phone stores, automobile dealerships, home builders, restaurants and retail shops all thrive on dollars from Union County grain crops. In Union County, the Corn Festival is not merely a symbolic hearkening back to an idealized agricultural heritage—it is a celebration of the crop that provides the current livelihood of much of the county. Union Countians are still firmly tied to the land and

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<sup>22</sup> Brown, *Ghost Dancing*.



labor involved in raising corn, and culturally, the Corn Festival is a site where even those not working directly with the crop can celebrate deep economic impact that grain production has on their lives.

Union County's corn crop has also helped to define its place in the agricultural economy of the Commonwealth of Kentucky as a whole, as it has long maintained a position in the top 20 of Kentucky's 120 counties in total agriculture production receipts, despite having almost no revenue from the high dollar horse, tobacco, dairy, and poultry industries that dominate the counties ranked above it.<sup>23</sup> The standing of Union County corn in the Commonwealth has been indicated over the years by the participation of many Commissioners of Agriculture, including Alben Barkley, who served as Grand Marshall of the Corn Festival parade in 1981, and Dave Boswell, who served as Grand Marshall in 1986 and rode in the parade multiple other years.<sup>24</sup> In Kentucky, one of the Top 15 corn-producing states, corn is nearly synonymous with Union County.<sup>25</sup>

While the celebration of corn in Union County is justified by its economic impact, there are still aspects of the Corn Festival that celebrate the past more than the present. One way in which the pageantry of the Corn Festival has been distanced from the reality of contemporary farm work in recent decades is through the parade. The farm implements driven down the parade route are either antique, and no longer practical for

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23 Kentucky Office of USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service, access portal at [http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/Kentucky/index.asp](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Kentucky/index.asp); USDA Census of Agriculture Historical Archive, access portal at <http://agcensus.mannlib.cornell.edu/AgCensus>.

24 "The time is now for festival lovers," *Union County Advocate*, 16 September 1981; "Races, parade, quail, food make up annual festival," *Union County Advocate*, 12 September 1984; "Corn Festival's ready to pop," 10 September 1986.

25 USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Kentucky Field Office, *Kentucky Agricultural Statistics 2010-2011 Bulletin*, 2012

use, or very small. While antique farm equipment such as the corn picker in the 2011 parade, are crowd-pleasers, they are no longer indicative of the realities of farm operations. The gargantuan combines and tractors employed by Union County farmers today are in the fields during the festival, for it is typically held in the middle of active harvest time, and even if they were available for leisure rather than labor, they are too big and hazardous to fit down the child-lined parade route.

The past was a particular focus of the Corn Festival in 2011, as it celebrated not only the county's flagship crop, but also the 200th anniversary of Union County's formation out of neighboring Henderson County. Early in the planning of the commemorations and celebrations, the bicentennial committee generated a logo for the year's events and materials (Figure 5.1). Typical of many anniversary logos, it features a medallion with the county's name, "200 years," and the years "1811" and "2011" on it. Flanking the bottom half of the medallion are a coal miner's helmet with a brightly shining headlamp, and a modern-looking green-and-yellow tractor; inside the medallion is a pile of harvested corn ears with a golden, gently rolling field in the background. Initially, it seems as though agriculture occupies two places in the medallion to mining's one; however, the county's fields are sites where farming and mining both take place, on and under the ground. By showing symbols of mining and farming on either side of a gently rolling field, the bicentennial medallion not only celebrates the importance of both practices to the county's economy and culture, but also alludes to how they have shared and struggled over Union County's land.



*Figure 5.1: Union County Bicentennial Medallion*

With the Union County bicentennial as the theme of the 2011 Corn Festival, many of the floats in Saturday's parade celebrated it. The Grand Prize float, constructed by the Morganfield Home Center, a hardware and building supply store, included over 6,000 sheets of colored tissue paper and battery operated motors. Featured prominently was a giant rotating quarter that reproduced the bicentennial medallion with its symbols of coal and corn, flanked by two smiling, rotating oversized ears of corn (Figure 5.2).



*Figure 5.2: Morganfield Home Center Float*

The second most elaborately-crafted float in the parade, which also used thousands of sheets of tissue paper, won the prize category of best float by a business, and was produced by River View Coal, which was also a gold-level financial sponsor of the festival. The River View Coal Barge float stayed true to its corporate source and included only a minimal mention of the county's other major economic driver (Figure 5.3). Riders on the float wore neon yellow t-shirts with “COAL” in large block letters on the front, and “Corn Festival 2011” in small letters to the side underneath. Though the tossing of candy from other floats had created excitement among parade goers, the River

View Coal float featured a projectile cannon, which worked the crowd into a frenzy. The seemingly endless stream of small parcels launched from the cannon were unidentifiable by the crowd at first; they were all black, and resembled lumps of coal flying through the air. The crowd soon discovered that the lumps came in two forms—t-shirts, and towels, which bore an image of a miner looking over a city at night, and the words “Powering America.”



*Figure 5.3: River View Mine Float*

This was not the first time that River View Coal had caused a stir in the Corn Festival parade. In the 2010 parade, they took the grand overall prize with their float that depicted an underground mine with a conveyor belt that spewed candy instead of coal out to the crowds. The 2009 festival parade also included two floats featuring historical and contemporary mining equipment. However, media coverage of Corn Festival parades prior to these years made no mention of coal company involvement among the various sponsors and businesses it listed.<sup>26</sup>

Despite coal's near parity with grain agriculture in gross receipts in Union County, the county does not hold an annual Coal Festival. Two other communities in the region, Providence in Webster County, Kentucky, and Shawneetown across the river in Illinois, both hold coal festivals. While the surface-disrupting coal mining in the hills outside of Shawneetown has been fraught with controversy among residents of Southern Illinois, Providence is actively a coal town, with coal trains running constantly through downtown and underground mines surrounding it.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, as attendance at the Providence festival in 2011 revealed, despite bearing the name of the commodity central to the local

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26 *Union County Advocate* and Corn Festival Programs. Despite the lack of a dedicated festival, the coal industry has still been periodically publicly honored in the county. In 1991, for example, the Corn Festival was held September 20-21. The *Advocate* published its standard pre-festival articles and two-page spread of advertisers pledging support for and advertising special offers during the Corn Festival in the 18 September issue the week prior. While the next week's *Advocate*, following the Festival, featured a front-page photo of a child in a corn ride, it was not dominated by Corn Festival coverage as it was in most years. Rather, that issue featured a 16-page special supplement entitled "COAL," which featured articles on the history of the industry in the county, profiles of local coal companies, advice for miners, and copious advertisements from local businesses professing their appreciation for and support of coal mining in Union County. September was the month of celebration for both of the county's major economic endeavors that year.

27 Jeff Biggers, *Reckoning at Eagle Creek: The Secret Legacy of Coal in the Heartland* (New York: Nation Books, 2010).

economy, coal itself is not particularly celebrated. There is no parade of coal equipment, no coal-shoveling contests, and no coal iconography on the festival grounds. The festival took the form of a generic small-town carnival, with food booths, rides, and a beauty pageant, but without tribute to coal aside from the name. Both Union County's historic lack of a coal festival and Providence's lack of coal celebration at its coal festival may be attributable to the economic relationship of coal to the communities. Though coal extraction pays good wages for miners, the mining corporations are not locally-based, and so unlike with corn farming, the bulk of the wealth generated by mining is not cycled back into the local economy, and thus local people do not reap its rewards as pervasively. There is less for the community as a whole to celebrate. Nevertheless, with River View's sponsorship and active participation in the Corn Festival and other local activities, that coal company is growing more deeply involved in the local culture and local economy.

As part of the strength of its agricultural economy and identity, Union County is tightly linked to the commonwealth's land grant institution, the University of Kentucky. Since the early twentieth century, the Cooperative Extension Service of the University College of Agriculture has played an important and visible role in the county. The quality of the county's land and centrality of agriculture to its culture and economy have meant that Union Countians both sought out and valued assistance from the land grant school in improving their farming practices, and the university sought out Union County farmers and agribusinesses for research partnerships, particularly centered around its flagship crop of corn. The UK Extension program is a part of the daily life of most people in the

county, through its agents' radio programs, newspaper articles, farm and business visits, 4-H clubs, educational programming, and partnerships with local agencies. In addition to Extension, many in Union County are connected to the main University of Kentucky campus in Lexington. Especially since the 1980s, most young people in the County seeking to become part of the county's successful family farming operations have attended the university, in addition to others who attended because they wished to pursue careers that required a college degree. Union Countians seeking to work in the coal industry at the white collar level have pursued degrees in mining engineering and business at the university. Even those who did not attend UK themselves or have a family member who did are still connected to the university because it is such a part of the identity of the entire Commonwealth of Kentucky, particularly through its men's basketball team. Involvement with the UK is part of Union County's identity, and changes that affect the university's identity have an impact in corn country.

### ***Coal and basketball***

In October 2009, just a few weeks after the opening of Union County's River View mine, the University of Kentucky announced that it would be changing the name of the soon-to-be-rebuilt on-campus residence hall housing the men's basketball team from “Wildcat Lodge” to “Wildcat Coal Lodge” because of stipulations accompanying a \$7 million donation for the new construction. The donation had been organized and substantially bolstered by Joseph W. Craft III, who was at the opening of the River View



mine in his role as Chief Executive of Alliance Resource Partners, the mine's parent company. The donation included over \$4 million of his own funds, in addition to money he had gathered from others in the coal industry. The news drew mixed reactions from UK students and alumni, Kentucky and national news media, and the general public. The proposed re-naming even invoked the ire of UK alumnus and internationally-known Kentucky author and farmer Wendell Berry, whose drastic response substantially altered his once-cozy relationship with the university. Despite outcries in protest of the naming by Berry and others, the name Wildcat Coal Lodge was approved and the hall opened in August 2012.

As described in the introduction and detailed in earlier chapters, while there has been some controversy over coal mining at moments in Union County, its history in much of the rest of the commonwealth has been much more tumultuous. The conflict over the naming of Wildcat Coal Lodge reflects decades of ongoing struggles within and outside of the Commonwealth of Kentucky over mine labor, coal's boom-and-bust economic impact, coal's use as an energy source, and environmental effects of coal extraction, the last particularly as associated with practices of strip and mountaintop mining. Because of the long and nationally-known tradition and success of the University of Kentucky basketball program, and the commonwealth- and nation-wide strength of its fan base, facilities associated with the team play a major part in how Kentucky is perceived around the country and the world. Thus, the naming debate was not just a battle over coal mining itself, but also over the place identity of the

commonwealth as a whole, and to an extent, its parts, such as Union County.

In the controversy over the insertion of the word “Coal,” in “Wildcat Lodge,” the naming of a culturally significant place became intertwined in global capitalism and environmental concerns. While the adoption of the name appeared to be a victory for the coal industry, it also brought popular attention to the conflicts over coal within the commonwealth. Indeed, the Wildcat Coal Lodge name quickly became a potent rallying point for those who are anti-coal, alongside its function as a tribute to coal. The remainder of this chapter investigates how conflicts over coal mining and use have become conflicts over the place identity of Kentucky, as exemplified by the fight over the naming of a facility for Kentucky's best-known athletic team.

#### *Place identity and place names*

In the Wildcat (Coal) Lodge naming controversy, the places being considered in terms of their identities range in scale from a section of a university campus where a building is located, to the whole campus, to the entire Commonwealth of Kentucky. In the controversy over re-naming Wildcat Lodge, three main power struggles stand out; language's power to establish place identity; the power asserted through the construction of buildings on the landscape; and economic power—power gained from wielding financial resources. With the naming of Wildcat Coal Lodge, the cultural issues of language and place identity met capitalism's entanglements of money and power.

Particularly since Yi-Fu Tuan's 1991 call for increased attention to the role of

language in place-making, geographers have been concerned with how place names can affect place identity.<sup>28</sup> At the behest of Wilbur Zelinsky, this scholarship has come to include not only place names found on topographic maps, but also those at a smaller scale, such as names of buildings.<sup>29</sup> As Tuan asserted, “speech—the right to speak and be heard, the right to name and have that name ‘stick’ is empowerment.”<sup>30</sup> He adds, “Naming is power—the creative power to call something into being, to render the invisible visible, to impart a certain character to things.”<sup>31</sup> Place names are the primary method by which places are differentiated and attempted to be made unique and separate from other places through language. The name of a place is a key part of place identity, as it can have a powerful effect on people's perceptions and experiences. Place names have the power to evoke strong emotions when combined with the material experience of being in a physical place, but they can also be powerful when heard or read far from the place's physical location.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, place names can trigger sharp mental and physical associations that guide not only what people think about a landscape but also how they act.<sup>33</sup>

Having established the importance of a place's name in its identity, it follows that a name change, like Wildcat Lodge to Wildcat Coal Lodge, has the potential to radically

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28 Yi-Fu Tuan, “Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 81 (1991): 684-696.

29 Wilbur Zelinsky, “Along the frontiers of name geography,” *Professional Geographer* 49 (1997): 465-66.

30 Tuan, “Language,” 685.

31 Tuan, “Language,” 688.

32 Amanda Kearney and John Bradley, “‘Too strong to ever not be there’: place names and emotional geographies,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 10 (2009): 77-94.

33 Thomas Thornton “Anthropological studies of Native American place naming,” *American Indian Quarterly* 21 (1997): 209-28.

change that identity. Tuan asserts that name and place “so merge in the consciousness of the people who know both that to change the name is to change, however subtly and inexplicably, the feature itself.” The idea behind a name change is “that, somehow, the new name itself has the power to wipe out the past and call forth the new.”<sup>34</sup> A name is such a key part of a place's definition and being, that there is the possibility that changing a name could change a place itself; accordingly, struggles over changing place names have often resulted in long, intense debates and sometimes even violence.

Changes in names may not only be sources of controversy themselves, but may also be manifestations of other struggles for place identity and social power. These struggles might be said to operate within a “cultural politics of naming,” as they are attempts by groups “to control, negotiate, and contest the naming process as they engage in wider struggles for legitimacy and visibility.”<sup>35</sup> Whether the source or a symptom of controversy, in previous studies of names and place identity, the crux of the struggle has usually been at the intersection of culture and politics.<sup>36</sup> In the case of the renaming of Wildcat Lodge, the struggle is at the intersection of culture and capitalism. Basketball and coal both form substantial parts of Kentucky's cultural milieu, and coal has historically been a substantial force in the economy in multiple parts of the state, though also a controversial one. As will be detailed, this controversy has largely stemmed from

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34 Tuan, “Language,” 688.

35 Reuben Rose-Redwood, Derek Alderman, Maoz Azaryahu, “Geographies of toponymic inscription: new directions in critical place-name studies,” *Progress in Human Geography* 34 (2010): 453-470, quote from 457.

36 J. Carlos Faraco and Michael Murphy, “Street Names and Political Regimes in an Andalusian Town,” *Ethnology* 26 (1997): 123-48.

most coal operations being controlled by large global corporations, typically thought to have little concern for local economies, environments, and cultural interests.

The cultural-economic conflict over a name is also a conflict over the physical place on the University of Kentucky campus that the lodge occupies. Geographers who study power and place have established that the built landscape can function as a force for maintaining social order in contested spaces. The construction and representation of the built environment can be part of establishing and maintaining hegemony, seemingly settling, with the strength of materials like brick and concrete, what is dominant and “correct” among those interacting with that landscape. Those surrounded by such symbolic buildings and other structures in their daily lives absorb the messages they convey.<sup>37</sup> Don Mitchell determines that as these landscapes serve simultaneously as physical objects and convey meaning through the representative language of their built form, as they exert power over social groups through their physical presence. In the language of representation of landscapes, the power to harm comes through what Mitchell calls the “sticks and stones”--that is the real, physical elements that physically define how people interact with a place.<sup>38</sup> Names of a piece of the built environment, then, such as a residence hall on a university campus, have intensified meaning and impact, since they are grounded on the physical space and structure, which acts on people in tandem with representations of the buildings through language.

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37 John Harner, “Place Identity and Copper Mining in Sonora, Mexico.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 91 (2001): 660-680.

38 Don Mitchell, “Sticks and stones: The work of landscape (a reply to Judy Walton's “How real(ist) can you get?”) “ *Professional Geographer* 48 (1996): 94-96.

### *Kentucky basketball*

The University of Kentucky has the winningest men's college basketball team in the nation, in both total number of wins and percentage of games won. They have won eight Division I NCAA tournament national championships (1948, 1949, 1951, 1958, 1978, 1996, 1998, and 2012), second in number only to UCLA. The Wildcats have the most total NCAA tournament game wins of any team, in their 53 appearances in the NCAA tournament and 16 appearances in the NCAA tournament Final Four.

The team rose to its consistent position in the national spotlight under Adolph Rupp, who coached the Wildcats from 1930 to 1972. In March 1949, when UK won its second NCAA championship title, the team had also finished the regular season ranked Number 1 in the first-ever season of the Associated Press basketball poll. In January 1969, the Wildcats became the first team in college basketball history to win 1000 games. Joe B. Hall succeeded Rupp as UK's head coach, and during his tenure, Kentucky's tradition of building unprecedented college basketball infrastructure began, as both Rupp Arena and the original Wildcat Lodge were constructed. He retired in 1985. Coaches since then include the scandal-plagued Eddie Sutton (under whom Kentucky's team was put on multi-year probation); Rick Pitino (only plagued with scandal after taking a coaching job at the University of Louisville in 2001); Tubby Smith; and Billy Gillispie, whose career at Kentucky was limited to 2007-2009. In April 2009, John Calipari took over the head coaching position at Kentucky, which he still held at the submission of this dissertation. Calipari was hired by the university not only for his proven record as a

winning college coach, but also for his skills in public and donor relations, both of which had been considered weak points for Gillespie.

As might be expected of a team with such a long history of success, the Wildcats have a large and passionately dedicated fan base. This dedication stretches back to March 1921, when hundreds of Wildcat fans received 'play-by-play' coverage of what is believed to be the first-ever college basketball tournament via telegraph, and celebrated with a parade when the Cats, who had won the tournament, returned to Lexington by train.<sup>39</sup> The fans' enthusiasm resulted in the construction of one of the largest arenas for college basketball, which consistently sells out, Rupp Arena in downtown Lexington, and has even pressured other schools to change their rules for ticket purchasing to avoid having their home arenas overrun by Wildcat fans when their team plays Kentucky.<sup>40</sup> While the fervor of the Kentucky basketball fan base is certainly extreme, this chapter does not presume to claim it is entirely unique. Fans of other college basketball teams—the University of North Carolina Tarheels or University of Indiana Hoosiers, for example—or other college sports—say, football for the University of Texas Longhorns or Ohio State Buckeyes—are likely quite familiar with enthusiastic and extreme fan culture surrounding a team.

Coffee table books and special-edition periodicals have long catered to fan desire for more coverage and information on Wildcat basketball history and current team, and

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39 Men's Basketball Archives, *Official Site of the Kentucky Wildcats*, 2012. Available at <http://www.ukathletics.com/sports/m-baskbl/archive/kty-m-baskbl-archive.html>. Accessed 16 October 2012.

40 Jon Scott, "Kentucky Inspired Rule Changes," 13 May 2001. Available at <http://www.bigbluehistory.net/bb/rulechanges.html>. Accessed 16 October 2012.

those who manage to get calls through to radio shows have been able to have their opinions on the team, coaching staff, and management heard. Wildcat fans now produce much of this information and voice opinions with no or limited moderation through blogs, dedicated forums, and comments on sports news articles on the web. These internet texts have become not only valuable sources for team history and personal memoirs, and avenues for armchair Cats coaches to make their game plans public, but also sources for first-hand accounts of what fans and interested others think about decisions involving the team and the university, including the naming of Wildcat Coal Lodge.

All of this success, legend, and public culture coalesce to make the UK men's basketball team a strong part of Kentucky's place identity, in the eyes of those both inside and outside of the commonwealth. As sports writer Lonnie Wheeler, who is not particularly a Kentucky fan, has noted, "To an almost frightening extent, basketball is the thing Kentucky chooses for its identity."<sup>41</sup> Wheeler claims that basketball is the identity shared across the commonwealth, whereas the other things that the Kentucky is known for—bourbon distilling, horse farming and racing, and, of course, coal mining—"tell the tales of their own sub-states." He posits that "there are times—say, from mid-November to early April—when one could make the forgivable mistake of thinking that basketball is what the commonwealth is."<sup>42</sup> Wheeler attributes this not only to Kentucky's winning record, Rupp and other charismatic coaches, and Kentucky's lack of a major-league

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41 Lonnie Wheeler, *Blue Yonder—Kentucky: The United State of Basketball* (Wilmington, OH: Orange Frazer Press, 1998), 4.

42 Wheeler, *Blue Yonder*, 4.



professional sports team, but also to ongoing “image” and “self-esteem” problems, tied up in part with the isolation and lore surrounding its mountain communities.<sup>43</sup> Even in a year like 2012-2013, when the Wildcats had a bad season, the Commonwealth of Kentucky was still identified strongly with basketball, as the University of Louisville won the NCAA tournament. This centrality of men's basketball to Kentucky's identity is part of why the naming of the basketball residence hall is a matter of importance across the commonwealth.

Basketball is a twentieth-century addition to the commonwealth's place identity, but sport has long been central to it. Prior to the Civil War, Kentucky was the center for the breeding of race horses, with horses raised on its farms both winning races across the nation and, as studs, parenting later greats. Lyman Weeks, who wrote a history of horse racing in 1898, noted that, after the financial panics of 1837 and 1857, Kentucky was the only place where horse racing was booming on the eve of the Civil War. Kentucky lost this position of dominance in the thoroughbred industry during and after the war, as northeastern industrialists renewed their interest and massive financial investments in the sport. The racing industry in Kentucky suffered from the perception that the central, horse-raising Bluegrass region of the commonwealth was ravaged by lawlessness and violence. As Maryjean Wall has argued, it was through the resurgence of the thoroughbred industry and emergence of the Derby as a preeminent race in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that returned Kentucky to a place not only with

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43 Wheeler, *Blue Yonder*, 8.

an identity attached to horse racing, but also to Old South gentility.<sup>44</sup>

Though a Southern regional identity is attached to Kentucky through horse racing and other attributes of the commonwealth, Kentucky has other regional identities attached to it as well, including Appalachian, Midwestern, and Ohio River Valley. University of Kentucky basketball contributes to these regional associations, as longstanding rivalries exist not only within the school's own Southeastern Conference (SEC), but also with nearby schools affiliated with its other regional identities, including Indiana University and the University of Louisville, which play in other conferences. Because of the strong role that University of Kentucky basketball plays in Kentucky's place identity, the naming of the building to house the basketball players becomes a part of the place identity for the entire commonwealth.

### *Coal in Kentucky*

As detailed in Chapter 1, coal has been a part of Kentucky's energy usage and production since at least the time of Euro-American settlement and possibly before. For well over a century, the coal industry has been a major force in the commonwealth's economy, yet neither its economic nor its social impacts on the people of the state have all been positive or unquestioned. Coal has long received heavy opposition from organizations and individuals both inside and outside of the commonwealth. As described in Chapter 2, since at least the late-nineteenth century in western Kentucky,

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44 Maryean Wall, *How Kentucky Became Southern: a tale of Outlaws, Horse Thieves, Gamblers, and Breeders* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2010).

when farmers balked at relinquishing acres from their farm lands for mining transportation infrastructure and camps, there has been resistance to changes that coal mining has brought to Kentucky landscape and lifestyle. Resistance to mining has grown across Kentucky with the growth in use of surface mining processes, which disturb the visible landscape even more extensively than underground mining. In 1940 surface mining extracted only 2% of the commonwealth's coal, but this share had increased to one-third by 1960 and to one-half by 1974. Reclamation standards for surface mining were strengthened beginning in the late 1960s, which helped reduce the coal mined by surface methods to 40% of the state's output by 1993.<sup>45</sup> The statistic does not reflect the whole story of above-ground mining, however, as the Surface Mining and Regulation Act of 1977 specifically allowed for waivers for mountaintop removal mining sites, so that they did not have to be returned to their original contour. Mountaintop mining sites have been converted to a variety of post-mining landscape uses, including pastures for livestock; housing, retail, and industrial developments; and prison facilities. Mountaintop mining operations typically generate large amounts of spoil, or excess soil, rock, and other matter, which is stored in valley fills.<sup>46</sup>

Potential effects of mountaintop mining on the environment and human health and safety have been extensively debated. This chapter is not as concerned with what these effects ultimately are shown to be as with the ideas about the potential dangers of

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45 Lowell Harrison and James Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1997).

46 U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Surface Coal Mining: Characteristics of Mining in Mountainous Areas of Kentucky or West Virginia (GAO-10-21)*, December 2009. Available at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d1021.pdf>. Accessed 16 October 2012.

mountaintop mining that motivated some of the protest of the name “Wildcat Coal Lodge.” Numerous Kentucky, Appalachian regional, and nationwide environmental and social justice organizations, including Kentuckians for the Commonwealth and the Sierra Club, work in collaboration to spread information about potential dangers of mountaintop mining and lobby against it. Negative impacts of mountaintop removal mining cited by these organizations include: pollution of streams through the sedimentation and leaching of chemicals from rock exposed by mining; loss of biologically-rich forests and the wildlife habitat they provide; and increased cancer and birth defect rates in populations near mountaintop removal mining operations.<sup>47</sup> These impacts became part of the rallying cry for many opposing the naming of Wildcat Coal Lodge.

#### *Joseph Craft and Alliance Resource Partners*

The largest corporate mine presence in Western Kentucky is currently Joseph Craft's Oklahoma-based Alliance Resource Partners, which also has mines in Eastern Kentucky. Alliance uses underground mining as its primary means of production at all of its mines.<sup>48</sup> Alliance Coal's corporate history began in 1971, when a Fortune 500 diversified energy company known as MAPCO Inc., acquired the highly productive

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47 Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, “Mountaintop Removal and Strip Mining,” 2012. Available at <http://kftc.org/campaigns/mountaintop-removal-and-strip-mining>. Accessed 16 October 2012; ilovemountains.org, “About ilovemountains.org,” 2012. Available at <http://ilovemountains.org/about>. Accessed 16 October 2012.

48 Laura Clark, “The face of coal: Joe Craft to speak on culture, importance of resource in Kentucky,” *Kentucky Kernel*, 4 November 2009. Available at <http://kykernel.com/2009/11/04/the-face-of-coal/>. Accessed 16 October 2012. Joe Craft, “#503: Joe Craft. One to One with Bill Goodman,” Kentucky Educational Television, first broadcast 17 January 2010. Available at <http://www.ket.org/onetoone/program.fwx?programid=ONON0503>. Accessed 16 October 2012.

Dotiki underground coal mine in Webster County in Kentucky's Western Coalfields. Over the next 25 years, the company acquired more mines in Kentucky, and additional mines in Illinois and Maryland, as well as a coal loading terminal in Indiana on the Ohio River.<sup>49</sup> The company also acquired Joe Craft as part of the management team for its coal operations.

Craft was born in 1950 in Hazard, Kentucky, where he lived until he went to the University of Kentucky in 1968. While he was aware of Eastern Kentucky coal mining culture, he was not part of it, as his father was a lawyer and no one in his family mined. He attended the University of Kentucky, and trained to become an accountant, and then went to law school to be a tax attorney. When coal boomed in response to the petroleum crisis in the 1970s, Craft, during his second year in law school, was recruited by a coal company looking for management as it built operations in Eastern Kentucky. Craft served as both the CFO and general counsel for MAPCO, and in 1986, he moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, and became the company's president. When MAPCO decided to close its coal operations in 1996, Craft led a buyout and changed the name to Alliance Coal Company.<sup>50</sup>

Within two years of Alliance's formation, the company had acquired more mining operations in both western and eastern Kentucky, in Hopkins Co and Pike Co, respectively, and was the sixth-largest coal producer in the eastern U.S.. The company became Alliance Resource Partners in 1999, and throughout the first decade of the 2000s,

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49 Alliance Resource Partners, L.P., "Company History." Available at <http://www.arlp.com/about/history.htm>. Accessed 16 October 2012.

50 Clark, "The face of coal"; Craft, "#503: Joe Craft."

expanded its operations in Western Kentucky and Southern Indiana.<sup>51</sup> The company's operations in western Kentucky culminated in the opening of the River View Mine in 2009. Despite its substantial operations to the east of the Mississippi River, and particularly in Kentucky, Alliance remains based in Tulsa. Joseph Craft and his wife, who divorced in late 2011, were estimated by Forbes to have a net worth of \$1.4 billion as of March 2012.<sup>52</sup>

Though Craft has donated money to programs and funds throughout the university, beginning with a \$500 donation to the Mineral Law Center on December 31, 1990, his largest donations have by far been to infrastructure for basketball.<sup>53</sup> He donated \$6 million toward the \$30 million required to fund a new athletics facility attached to Memorial Coliseum that opened in 2007.<sup>54</sup> The facility, which is called the Joe Craft Center, houses practice courts, locker rooms, lounges and other areas for both the men's and women's basketball teams, as well as offices for the athletics department.<sup>55</sup> In stating why he has donated so much money to the support of athletics, Craft asserted the benefits of athletics to education and that he believed that UK basketball could build enthusiasm in youth and help them meet their goals. He explained, "I'm a strong believer in athletics.... Some people took the very narrow view of, 'Why would you give such a large gift to only nine or 10 people? But I personally believe that gift touches millions of

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51 Alliance Resource Partners, "Company History."

52 Forbes, "The World's Billionaires: Joseph Craft II & family," March 2012. Available at <http://www.forbes.com/profile/joseph-craft/>. Accessed 1 October 2013.

53 Clark, "The face of coal."

54 Stinnett. "Dignitaries celebrate."

55 Athletic Department, "Joe Craft Center – Basketball Practice Facility," on the *Official Site of the Kentucky Wildcats*. Available at <http://www.ukathletics.com/athletic-dept/craft-center.html>. Accessed 16 October 2012.

people. Look at the culture of the [UK basketball] program. [It is] more than just a sport for nine guys, it's a culture.”<sup>56</sup>

From soon after his April 2009 hiring as Kentucky's head basketball coach, John Calipari has been involved with Joe Craft and Alliance Resource Partners. One of the earliest public demonstrations of this was at the River View mine dedication in September 2009, described at the beginning of this chapter. On 29 April 2011, a few weeks after his first time leading the Wildcat men's basketball team to the Final Four, Calipari visited coal mines in Martin and Pike Counties in Eastern Kentucky. The visit was part of an incentive program Craft had developed, wherein he promised the miners that if they remained accident-free for 400 days, he would bring Coach Calipari to the mines.<sup>57</sup> While Calipari publicly attributes his involvement in coal industry events such as these to his *father's* work as a coal miner, Craft's financial contributions to the University of Kentucky basketball program are also a likely motivator.

### *The path to Wildcat Coal Lodge*

Coach Calipari has cited the 1970s construction of Wildcat Lodge as an example of how “being nontraditional is a part of the tradition at Kentucky.” The 20,000 square foot Wildcat Lodge opened in 1978, during the tenure of Coach Hall, who, according to Calipari, “decided we're going to have a different type of housing.”<sup>58</sup> Donations provided

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56 Clark, “The face of coal.”

57 Steve LeMaster, “Calipari tours mines in Martin, Pike counties.” *Floyd County Times*, 2011. Available at [http://floydcountytimes.com/view/full\\_story/13067711/article-Calipari-tours-mines-in-Martin-Pike-counties](http://floydcountytimes.com/view/full_story/13067711/article-Calipari-tours-mines-in-Martin-Pike-counties). Accessed 18 October 2012.

58 John Calipari, “Being nontraditional is a tradition at Kentucky,” *John Calipari CoachCal.com*, May

the funds to construct the lodge, located near Memorial Coliseum on campus, where the team was still practicing though games had moved to Rupp Arena in downtown Lexington. Basketball players already had celebrity status both on and off campus in those years, so the lodge was designed as a place for them “to retreat from being in the spotlight.” The lodge was not a traditional college dormitory; it had “luxury areas, extra-large beds, individual rooms and showers,” and was considered at the time to be “one of (if not the) poshest athletic dormitories in the nation.” In 1979, the NCAA stated that Wildcat Lodge was in violation of a rule stating that “college athletes could not receive better accommodations than what was available to regular students.” Though UK claimed that the rule was instated after Wildcat Lodge was constructed, they still submitted to the NCAA and housed non-athletes in the lodge, closed some of the amenity areas, and had students share rooms.<sup>59</sup>

The most recent renovation of the Joe B. Hall Wildcat Lodge—the name of the coach responsible for the building of the lodge built was added after his retirement—had been in 2000. This \$1.4 million project included updates to the sleeping rooms, bathrooms, building exterior, plumbing, and heating and air conditioning systems; still, the building was significantly showing its age after three decades.<sup>60</sup> On 9 December 2008, the Finance Committee of the University of Kentucky Board of Trustees met; the

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2012. Available at <http://www.coachcal.com/14491/2012/05/being-nontraditional-is-a-tradition-at-kentucky/>. Accessed 16 October 2012.

<sup>59</sup> Scott, “Kentucky Inspired Rule Changes.”

<sup>60</sup> Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, University of Kentucky Renovation of Wildcat Lodge: Action Item E-5, September 27, 1999. Available at <http://cpe.ky.gov/about/cpe/meetings/1999/sept+1999+cpe+mtg+agenda.htm>. Accessed 16 October 2012.



eighth item on their docket was a request for approval to begin a substantial renovation process for Wildcat Lodge. Bob Wiseman, Vice President for Facilities Management, who had also presented other building-related appeals that day, described the need to refurbish the lodge's interior, improve lighting, and replace some sliding doors which were not working. The estimated cost for the project was \$1.5 million, to come from private donors. Wiseman's request received unanimous approval.<sup>61</sup>

While the \$1.5 million in renovations would have kept the existing lodge functional, there were more grandiose ideas afloat for improving the team's residential facilities. Joe Craft assembled a group called the “Difference Makers” to make a \$7 million donation to the university for the purpose of building a new men's basketball residence hall as part of the “Replace Wildcat Lodge Student Housing” capital project.<sup>62</sup> Craft himself was the biggest donor of the group, putting in \$4.5 million. Other donors, who pledged between \$50,000 and \$410,000 each, included several coal companies and coal industry executives, as well executives in coal-related industries, and other associates of Craft. While many of their corporate affiliations operated out of cities and towns throughout Kentucky, in addition to Craft's Oklahoma-based Alliance, other Difference Makers also represented coal companies based in areas outside of the

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61 Barbara Royalty-Tatum, Minutes of the Finance Committee, University of Kentucky Board of Trustees, 9 December 2008. Available at [www.uky.edu/Trustees/minutes/finance/2008/finmin20081209.pdf](http://www.uky.edu/Trustees/minutes/finance/2008/finmin20081209.pdf) . Accessed 16 October 2012.

62 Kristen Cheser, Minutes of the Finance Committee, University of Kentucky Board of Trustees, 27 October 2009. Available at [www.uky.edu/Trustees/minutes/finance/2009/oct/minutes.pdf](http://www.uky.edu/Trustees/minutes/finance/2009/oct/minutes.pdf). Accessed 16 October 2012; Andy Mead, “\$7 million for UK basketball player dorm would put 'coal' in the name,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 24 October 2009. Available at <http://www.kentucky.com/2009/10/24/990113/7-million-for-uk-basketball-player.html>. Accessed 16 October 2012.

commonwealth, including Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and North Carolina.<sup>63</sup>

On 20 October 2009, the University of Kentucky and Craft, on behalf of the Difference Makers, entered into a gift agreement. The Difference Makers and the University agreed to a list of terms, including the amount pledged—a maximum of seven million dollars—for design, construction, furnishings, landscaping, and other costs, and that the amount would be paid over ten years, beginning in the 2009-2010 fiscal year. Half of the annual proceeds of the Keightley Classic, a fundraising golf tournament and auction, up to \$150,000 per year, from 2008 and 2009 and the ten year pledge period could be used to reduce the size of the total amount paid to the project by the Difference Maker donors. The gift agreement also included the provision that the building be named the “Wildcat Coal Lodge,” and that this name be used in all of the university's electronic and print materials. Included in this provision was the stipulation that “if approval of that name or another name acceptable to Craft in his discretion is not received prior to the beginning of the Pledge Period, the Members and Craft shall have no obligation to make any payments.” The agreement also included the requirement for “an exhibit in the primary entrance lobby which presents in print, photographic, sound, video, DVD and/or other format, a discussion of and tribute to the importance of the coal industry to the Commonwealth of Kentucky.” This requirement went on to specify that the exhibit had to recognize each of the Difference Makers individually and be “acceptable to Craft.” If the exhibit was not established in a timely manner, then Craft and the Difference Makers

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63 Linda Blackford, “Wildcat Coal Lodge will exhibit a tribute to coal,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 9 February 2011. Available at <http://www.kentucky.com/2011/02/09/1628392/wildcat-coal-lodge-will-have-tribute.html>. Accessed 16 October 2012.

were not obligated to pay their pledged money and could request return of funds already contributed to the project.<sup>64</sup>

### *Name controversy*

Controversy erupted on and off campus when it became public that the name of Wildcat Lodge would likely be changed to the Wildcat Coal Lodge.<sup>65</sup> The key difference between this and previous coal industry-related donations, as well as Craft's large donation for the basketball practice facility, which had not drawn so much attention, was in the name. Despite the basketball practice facility being called the Joe Craft Center, the casual observer likely does not know who Joe Craft is, other than a wealthy donor. He also made the donation before the protests against mountaintop mining in Kentucky became as intense and public as they have been in the past few years. Putting the name of an industry under environmental, social, and political scrutiny on the building housing Kentucky's most famous students was immediately recognized as having potentially far-reaching implications for the identity of the university and the commonwealth.

On 27 October 2009, the *Lexington Herald-Leader* described the Board of Trustees scheduled meeting for that day, at which the fate of the residence hall's name would be formally decided, as having “spawned a weekend of blogs, online and talk

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64 Difference Makers and University, University of Kentucky Gift Agreement, 20 October 2009.

65 Technically the name of the lodge had been the Joe B. Hall Wildcat Lodge; however, no one called it that. Later, in 2012, Craft participated the dedication of a statue of Hall outside the Lodge. See Linda Blackford, “Billionaire Joe Craft at nexus of Kentucky basketball, coal, and politics,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 4 November 2012. Available at <http://www.kentucky.com/2012/11/04/2395622/billionaire-joe-craft-at-nexus.html>. Accessed 8 January 2014.

show comments, and supermarket aisle discussions” through “the mix of coal and Kentucky basketball.” The article broke down opinions on the controversy into categories, including “It’s a dumb name that cheapens UK,” “It’s the donors’ money. They get to choose the name,” “The money should be spent for academics,” “The money should be spent in Eastern Kentucky,” and the dichotomous “Coal is bad” and “Coal is good.”<sup>66</sup> Both the depth and the breadth of these reactions to the proposed naming indicate public awareness of the significance of such a naming to Kentucky identity.

The *Herald-Leader* article quoted political science Professor Ernest Yanarella, a faculty representative to the Board of Trustees, as stating that “The university has no business promoting an industry that is under environmental siege.” Yanarella reported having received many emails from other faculty members who were opposed to the name, and he suggested that the group of donors use their group title, “Difference Makers” in the name of the residence hall, rather than “Coal,” as “that would fit better with an athletic program.”<sup>67</sup>

In addition to opposition from faculty members who took issue with the coal industry, there were faculty responses like that of chemistry professor David Atwood. He described himself as not against coal, and seeing it as continuing to be an important energy force in the future even with the embracing of renewables; however, he was worried about the potential that the word “coal” on the name of a major university

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66 Andy Mead, “Wildcat ‘Coal’ Lodge debate rages,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*. 27 October 2009. Available at <http://www.kentucky.com/2009/10/27/993282/wildcat-coal-lodge-debate-rages.html>. Accessed 16 October 2012.

67 Mead, “Wildcat ‘Coal’ Lodge debate rages.”

building could have for deterring top faculty and top students choosing to join the university in the future. He stated, "It looks like the coal industry is trying to make a statement .... If the pharmaceutical industry gave the university \$7 million, would it allow a 'Wildcat Pharmaceutical Lodge?'"<sup>68</sup> Responses like this indicate a concern for the power of the name in shaping the identity of the university that transcends the coal industry's actual relationship with the university.

In addition to faculty, students on campus reacted to the proposed name. Not surprisingly, members of the university's chapter of Kentuckians for the Commonwealth were among the most vocal in their opposition. Martin Mudd, a student member of KFTC, called the naming a choice for the university on "whether it's going to be a friend of big coal or a friend of Kentucky and Kentuckians" when interviewed by the university's student newspaper. He contrasted the name Wildcat Coal Lodge with other buildings on campus bearing donor names: "It's one thing naming it after somebody, some person, but I think that it's a bit perverse to name it after an industry that historically has cared very little about the plight of citizens it employs, people it employs and certainly the effects the industry has on people and ecosystems all down the line."<sup>69</sup> Another KFTC student member opposed to the name, Katie Goldey found it troubling that the name would imply that UK has "a partnership with coal." In addition to publicly

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68 Andy Mead, "\$7 million for UK basketball player dorm would put 'coal' in the name," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 24 October 2009. Available at <http://www.kentucky.com/2009/10/24/990113/7-million-for-uk-basketball-player.html>. Accessed 16 October 2012.

69 Katie Perkowski, "Basketball dorm naming rights causes stir over coal," *Kentucky Kernel*, 25 October 2009. Available at <http://kykernel.com/2009/10/25/basketball-dorm-naming-rights-causes-stir-over-coal/>. Accessed 17 October 2012.

voicing their opinions to the media, students opposed to the name also circulated and signed petitions.<sup>70</sup>

The Wildcat Coal Lodge naming controversy received what was likely its biggest jolt of publicity when Rachel Maddow covered it on her highly-rated prime-time show on MSNBC on Monday, 26 October, the evening before the meeting at which the Board of Trustees would vote on the name. The feature, which was given over four minutes of uninterrupted air time, spent more time mocking the name—with such versions as “The Coal Hut”—and arguing that putting a corporate name on a residence hall was somehow vaguely more offensive than putting one on a corporate stadium than it did actually discussing the reasons grounding the opposition to the name. Nevertheless, it catapulted the issue into the national spotlight.<sup>71</sup>

### *The board meeting*

On 27 October 2009, at the 11:15am meeting, Director of Athletics Mitch Barnhart presented the gift agreement with the Difference Makers to the Finance Committee of the Board of Trustees. They voted unanimously to accept it. At 1:00pm that same day, the full Board of Trustees met.

The minutes of the Board of Trustees meeting show that the naming of the Wildcat Coal Lodge was the most contentious issue on the docket that day. University President Lee Todd recommended that the board approve the name, noting that the

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<sup>70</sup> Mead, “\$7 million.”

<sup>71</sup> *The Rachel Maddow Show*, 26 October 2009.

Committee on Naming University Buildings had voted 6-1 for the name. After a motion of approval for the name was made and seconded, Professor Yanarella was the first to speak against the naming. Yanarella listed various grounds for opposition to the naming, including that it violated guidelines in the university's Administrative Regulations for naming of university property. He also argued that in general industry names were inappropriate for application to university property. The minutes summarized his sentiments as "The name that is attached to a piece of university property carries with it a symbolic intent, and in this particular case, it is hard to believe that the intention of Joe Craft and the Difference Makers has any other motive than to try to link the coal industry with the Wildcat basketball program. He said that UK can and should rise above this."<sup>72</sup> Some board members, including representatives from the student body and the university staff, echoed Yanarella's concerns about the name, and added such issues as abandoning the honor to Coach Hall and the negative feelings associated with illegal Eastern Kentucky wildcat coal mines of the 1970s and 1980s. In a comment that drew applause from the audience, staff representative Robyn Pease stated that, "The naming of such a high profile lodge would take UK a step backwards rather than push UK forward into the future."<sup>73</sup>

Other board members then spoke in favor of the naming. Their comments began by arguing that "Wildcat Coal Lodge" should be considered independently of any future

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72 Pamela May, Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the University of Kentucky, 27 October 2009. Available at <http://www.uky.edu/Trustees/minutes/2009/oct/minutes.pdf>. Accessed 18 October 2012. Quote from pg 4.

73 May, Minutes. Quote from page 6.

possible namings and not as setting a precedent for other industry names. Board member Bill Gatton then discussed positive effects of coal in Kentucky including jobs and relatively low costs of electricity compared to other places in the U.S.. Jo Hern Curris, who “stated that she is from the coal mines,” spoke of the pride and history of coal in Kentucky as a “national resource from both ends of the state.”<sup>74</sup> Other board members saw the naming as encouraging developments in clean coal technology; according to the minutes, James Stuckert asserted, “Everybody knows how strongly the people in the state feel about the UK basketball program. By putting the name on the lodge, this should redouble the efforts to get a cleaner source of energy from coal. There is not a downside to this. It is part of Kentucky whether you like it or not.”<sup>75</sup> President Todd called for support of the naming, citing the coal's heritage in the state, and nothing that, despite its being “somewhat ironic possibly,” the new residence hall would be a LEED-certified building.<sup>76</sup> The motion to accept the name passed, with only three board members—those who had spoken against it in the meeting—in opposition. “A disturbance by some individuals in the audience” caused the meeting to take a brief recess.<sup>77</sup>

#### *Responses to the name decision*

The approval of the naming prompted many reactions from those on both sides of the issue. While some groups prepared to further protest the name, university officials

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<sup>74</sup> May, Minutes. Quote from page 6.

<sup>75</sup> May, Minutes. Quote from page 6.

<sup>76</sup> May, Minutes. Quote from page 7.

<sup>77</sup> May, Minutes. Quote from page 7.



and Craft focused on publicly explaining the donation and decision.

UK's student newspaper, the *Kentucky Kernel*, which has been independent from the university since 1971 and bears a name hearkening to the land grant/agricultural tradition of the school, published a profile of Craft the week after the Board of Trustees decision. The profile included statements opposing the name in addition to statements from university officials and Craft. The profile explained that Craft wanted to provide a place where both the UK community and visitors could “pay tribute” and learn about advances in coal technology and “its positive contributions in the state and on campus.” The profile also included statements from Craft on his beliefs about the power of UK athletics to inspire millions of people, especially youth.<sup>78</sup>

UK Athletic Director Mitch Barnhart spoke appreciatively of Craft's and the Difference Makers' donation, “Our coaches and student-athletes strive to achieve high levels of success and bring pride to the Commonwealth... It is only through the generosity of those who love the Kentucky Wildcats that the resources needed to attain those goals are possible. Joe Craft has been a vital part of the continued growth of UK Athletics, and we are extremely grateful for his support and financial contributions.” UK then-President Lee Todd concurred, also in a statement to the *Kernel*, “He is a loyal UK alumnus, and we greatly appreciate his support and generous contributions to university student scholarships, academic programs and campus facilities.”<sup>79</sup>

The University of Kentucky's acceptance of a large gift from a group of alumni

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<sup>78</sup> Clark, “The face of coal.”

<sup>79</sup> Clark, “The face of coal.”

and other boosters with corporate attachments is by no means unique among college athletic programs. Such gifts go back to the very first intercollegiate athletic competitions. The 1852 rowing match between Harvard and Yale on New Hampshire's Lake Winnepesaukee, considered to be the first organized intercollegiate athletic event, was conceived of and sponsored by the Boston-Concord-Montreal Railroad. Transportation, alcohol, and lavish prizes were given to the players, while fans of both schools had to pay to ride the railroad to the distant, out-of-state event, and thousands did, thus achieving the rail company's goal in putting it on. By the turn of the twentieth century alumni donations were not only supporting football and other athletics programs at many universities, including Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth, but were also providing special amenities, treats, and facilities for players and coaches.<sup>80</sup>

More recently, many aspects of the high-visibility college sports of basketball and football have become corporate-sponsored, often with corporate names attached. Nike, Adidas, and other athletic apparel and shoe companies contractually pay and donate large sums of cash to universities and coaches and gear to student athletes, in exchange for the marketing value of having their products worn by top players and their names and logos visible in popular facilities. Multiple universities, including Texas Tech, Syracuse, and the University of Minnesota have accepted donations in the tens-of-millions from corporations to help finance the construction of stadiums and other athletics facilities, in exchange for using the corporations name as part of the facility name. Around the same

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<sup>80</sup> Mark Yost, *Varsity Green: A Behind the Scenes Look at Culture and Corruption in College Athletics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

time that Joe Craft gave his money and name to the University of Kentucky basketball practice facility, in-state rival University of Louisville opened the Yum! Center, which was also a basketball practice facility.<sup>81</sup> The University of Louisville had already sold the naming rights to its football stadium to Papa John's Pizza.<sup>82</sup>

Craft's donations and the donations he organized were not the first contributions of coal to Kentucky sports. Money earned through coal-related enterprises helped bolster Kentucky thoroughbred farms both before the Civil War and in the early twentieth-century.<sup>83</sup> As Joe B. Hall has pointed out, coal miners and companies were among the donors made significant financial contributions to the construction of the original Wildcat Lodge, in addition to coal companies providing coal for a fireplace in the residence hall.<sup>84</sup> Individuals closely related to the coal industry have also been significant donors to West Virginia University athletics. Chris Cline, West Virginia native and billionaire owner of a coal company with reserves concentrated in southern Illinois, and his family foundation, donated \$3 million toward the construction of the school's new basketball practice facility in 2011, simultaneously donating \$2 million to endow a chair in orthopedic surgery at the university's medical school.<sup>85</sup> As exemplified by the WVU example, athletics are certainly not the only aspects of university operations which receive coal-related

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81 Yum! Brands is the Louisville-based parent company of Kentucky Fried Chicken, Taco Bell, and Pizza Hut.

82 Yost, *Varsity Green*.

83 Wall, *How Kentucky Became*.

84 Mead, "Wildcat 'Coal' Lodge debate rages."

85 Keith Morris, "Coal company owner will donate \$ 5 million to WVU," 26 May 2011. Available at <http://www.examiner.com/article/coal-company-owner-will-donate-5-million-to-wvu>. Accessed 16 October 2012

sponsorship.

The University of Kentucky has entered into new coal industry-based sponsorships since the naming of Wildcat Coal Lodge in 2009. During the 2011-2012 school year, Friends of Coal, an offshoot of the Kentucky Coal Association, committed \$85,000 to sponsor three UK Athletics events, including football and basketball games. For the first of the year's sponsored events, a football game between Kentucky and Louisville, Friends of Coal billboards were featured across the UK stadium and Friends of Coal video clips were shown on the video scoreboard. At the game, the Friends of Coal organization also presented a check to UK's mining engineering department to fund scholarships for Kentucky students.<sup>86</sup> Friends of Coal also sponsored Big Blue Madness, the tradition-laden and well-attended first practice for the basketball teams, and the popular Kentucky-Louisville basketball game that year.<sup>87</sup> In response to these Friends of Coal sponsorships, the Sierra Club spent \$17,500 to sponsor the Kentucky basketball game against Arkansas on 17 January 2012.<sup>88</sup>

### *Wendell Berry and the Wildcat Coal Lodge*

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86 Linda Blackford, "Friends of Coal to sponsor Saturday's UK – U of L football game," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 15 September 2011. Available at <http://www.kentucky.com/2011/09/15/1882093/friends-of-coal-to-sponsor-saturdays.html>. Accessed 16 October 2012.

87 "Friends of Coal–Kentucky to Be Signature Sponsor of Men's Basketball Game between U.K. and U. of L.," *Business Wire*, 30 December 2011. Available at <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20111230005161/en/Friends-Coal%E2%80%93Kentucky-Signature-Sponsor-Men%E2%80%99s-Basketball-Game>. Accessed 18 October 2012.

88 Bill Estep, "Sierra Club sponsoring Kentucky basketball game," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 11 January 2012. Available at <http://www.kentucky.com/2012/01/11/2023075/sierra-club-sponsoring-university.html>. Accessed 18 October 2012.

Kentucky writer and farmer Wendell Berry, author of over 50 books and recipient of many national awards, was among those not pleased by the naming of Wildcat Coal Lodge. In a letter dated 20 December 2009, Wendell Berry declared that he was removing roughly 60 cubic feet of his personal papers that had been on loan to the University of Kentucky archives and transferring them to the Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort. In the letter, Berry wrote that "The University's president and board have solemnized an alliance with the coal industry, in return for a large monetary 'gift,' granting to the benefactors, in effect, a co-sponsorship of the University's basketball team."<sup>89</sup> He later stated, "When the university accepted the gift from coal industry in return for naming the basketball dormitory 'Wildcat Coal Lodge,' the university had sold an advertisement."<sup>90</sup> The withdrawal of the papers on loan did not remove absolutely all of Berry's papers from the university; the university's archives had, roughly 20 years prior, purchased some of Berry's papers for its permanent collections, and those would remain.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, Berry considered his removal of the loaned papers a severing of his relationship with the university: "I don't think the University of Kentucky can be so ostentatiously friendly to the coal industry ... and still be a friend to me and the interests for which I have stood for the last 45 years. (...) If they love the coal industry that much, I

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89 Cheryl Truman, "Wendell Berry pulling his personal papers from UK," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 23 July 2010. Available at <http://www.kentucky.com/2010/06/23/1319383/wendell-berry-pulling-his-personal.html>. Accessed 16 October 2012.

90 Taylor Moak, "Wendell Berry reflects on removal of papers," *Kentucky Kernel*, 13 February 2011. Available at <http://kykernel.com/2011/02/13/wendell-berry-reflects-on-removal-of-papers/>. Accessed 18 October 2012.

91 Moak, "Wendell Berry reflects on removal of papers."

have to cancel my friendship.”<sup>92</sup>

Berry was born in 1934 and grew up on his family's farm in northern Kentucky. He received his master's degree from the University of Kentucky. After building the foundations of his literary notoriety at Wallace Stegner writing program at Stanford and in New York City, in 1965 Berry bought a farm in Port Royal, Kentucky, which has served as his home base since then.<sup>93</sup> By 1965, at the latest, Berry had begun incorporating criticism of Kentucky's coal industry into his writing. In an essay written that year, “The Landscaping of Hell: Strip-Mine Morality in East Kentucky,” Berry addressed not only the environmental effects of mining known at the time (pollution through acid water from the mines), but also the power and influences that coal operators wielded over the regulations designed to govern them.<sup>94</sup> He has continued to write and speak against coal mining practices and mining company ideology. In February 2011, he participated in a sit-in-turned-sleep-in at the Kentucky State Capitol in Frankfort, after he and other protestors were disappointed by the outcome of a meeting with Governor Steve Beshear about mountaintop removal mining.<sup>95</sup>

Erik Reece, who teaches at the University of Kentucky, and is known for his 2006 book *Lost Mountain: A Year in the Vanishing Wilderness: Radical Strip Mining and the*

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92 Truman, “Wendell Berry pulling his personal papers from UK.”

93 David Skinner, Wendell E. Berry Biography, National Endowment for the Humanities Awards & Honors, 2012. Available at <http://www.neh.gov/about/awards/jefferson-lecture/wendell-e-berry-biography>. Accessed 18 October 2012.

94 Wendell Berry, “The Landscaping of Hell: Strip-Mine Morality in East Kentucky” in *The Long-Legged House* (New York: Audubon Society, 1971).

95 Beth Musgrave, “Protestors hold sleepover outside Kentucky Governor's office.” *Lexington Herald-Leader*. 12 February 2011. Available at <http://www.kentucky.com/2011/02/12/1631134/wendell-berry-among-protesters.html>. Accessed 18 October 2012.

*Devastation of Appalachia*, which covered both environmental and human tragedies resulting from mountaintop removal mining, wrote an op-ed for the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, published 6 March 2011. This was a few days following President Barack Obama awarding Wendell Berry the 2010 National Humanities Medal. Reece posited that this should have been a time of celebration for the university, but that UK could “claim no institutional pride” because of the coal industry gift which had led Berry to sever his ties with the university: “But now, when we in the UK community should be celebrating such a prestigious award bestowed upon one of our own, we must face the hard reality that an ill-conceived alliance with the coal industry has made that impossible.”<sup>96</sup>

Reece went on to describe the \$4.5 million Craft gave to fund Wildcat Coal Lodge as “blood money,” in light of eleven miner deaths in the previous five years at Alliance mines, all resulting from violations of safety regulations. Reece asserted that “The history of coal in Kentucky cannot be the future of coal in Kentucky,” listing reasons including climate change from fossil fuel use; health effects of strip mining and coal burning; mountaintop removal as a practice on track to destroy the Appalachian Mountains; and diminished economic impact and viability of the coal industry in Eastern Kentucky. Reece scoffed at a comment attributed to outgoing UK President Lee Todd that hiring Billy Gillespie as basketball coach was the worse decision that he had made during his term—a decision the hiring of Calipari was meant to correct, saying instead that “No. Taking Craft's money, and then allowing him to dictate the terms of that 'gift'

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96 Erik Reece, “Kentucky Voices: Coal industry 'gift' cost UK a celebration,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 6 March 2011. Available at <http://www.kentucky.com/2011/03/06/1659827/ky-voices-coal-industry-gift-cost.html>. Accessed 18 October 2012.

was his worst decision.”<sup>97</sup>

Craft responded to Reece in a *Herald-Leader* op-ed of his own a week later. Quoting heavily from Berry, on the value of learning from others and being peaceable toward enemies, Craft chided Reece for having falsely blamed Craft's “philanthropic contributions” for having taken the right to celebrate Berry's Humanities Medal away from UK. Craft placed the primary blame on Berry, saying that he “politicized the gift, taking his papers and going home and refusing to have any further affiliation with UK.” He went on to suggest, “It seems to me that, in a world full of diverse and often divergent political perspectives, there would be enough room in this academic institution for both Berry's views and the views of the donors.” Craft further disputed the information Reece had used, saying that Reece misrepresented Alliance Coal's safety record in light of the size of the operation and “reputation as a leader in workplace safety.”<sup>98</sup>

The public exchange between Reece and Craft, figureheads for two extremes of positions on coal in Kentucky, occurred a year and a half after the Wildcat Coal Lodge naming decision, and a year and a half before the opening of the lodge. Their exchange, and the action by Berry in which it was rooted, indicated that the battle over the intertwining of Kentucky's basketball identity with coal did not end with the Board of Trustees' approval of the name. The exchange demonstrates the potential for the Wildcat Coal Lodge name to continue to be a point of contestation for the commonwealth's

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97 Reece, “Kentucky Voices.”

98 Joe Craft, “Donation, Berry honor shouldn't be in conflict,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 14 March 2011. Available at <http://www.kentucky.com/2011/03/14/1670040/donation-berry-honor-shouldnt.html>. Accessed 18 October 2012.



identification with coal, rather than to reify it.

The coal industry remains a powerful force in Kentucky, and the University of Kentucky remains a center for those who question that power, from writers like Reece to researchers interested in alternative energy sources and environmental impacts of the coal industry to students concerned about how their futures will be fueled. While coal has long been an industry with dramatic economic ups and down, the year 2012 saw a troubled coal economy and predictions for permanent decline in the coal industry, particularly in Central Appalachia. The potential for the actual weakening of the importance of coal to Kentucky provided a window for protestors to once again call for its removal from powerful symbols of the Commonwealth's identity. On 5 September 2012, protestors from the UK Beyond Coal Coalition held an anti-coal rally on campus, at which they condemned both coal sponsorships at the university and the university's use of energy from coal-fired plants. Students, numbering around two dozen, first marched to the recently-opened Wildcat Coal Lodge and shouted "Ho, ho, hey, hey Wildcat Coal Lodge needs a new name!" The group, trailed by two campus policemen, then marched past the Lodge and to the Joe Craft Center, which they entered, while still shouting. As the protestors slowly honored police requests to exit the building, a student left a pile of asthma inhalers filled with notes from students. One of the notes was from a student with thyroid cancer whose hometown is Ashland, in Eastern Kentucky. She blames the coal industry for the unusually high rates of the cancer around her home.<sup>99</sup>

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99 Linda Blackford, "Anti-coal protestors march on Joe Craft Center at University of Kentucky," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 5 September 2012. Available at <http://www.kentucky.com/2012/09/05/2324343/anti-coal-protestors-march-on.html>. Accessed 18

Continued demonstrations like these reflect not only frustrations with Kentucky's and the university's coal identity, and the power of the Wildcat Coal Lodge name in reinforcing that identity, but also the perceived malleability of such name-identities and their ability to be appropriated by causes other than those they seem to support.. The university's gift agreement with Craft indicates that actually changing the name of Wildcat Coal Lodge would be financially nearly impossible for the university. Rather than preclude efforts to protest coal, this financial hold almost guarantees that the Wildcat Coal Lodge name will serve as a starting point for protesting the university's and the commonwealth's identification with coal for years to come.

Union County has experienced comparatively little of the coal mining troubles that have plagued other parts of Kentucky and stimulated the contempt for the coal industry that motivated the protest of the name “Wildcat Coal Lodge.” Nevertheless, despite Union now being at the top of Kentucky coal, leading all other counties in production, it is unlikely that the long-developed image of the coal industry as devastating to the environment and exploitative of its human laborers will be altered. Furthermore, it remains to be seen whether, because of its connections both to the University and to Joseph Craft through the River View mine, and with its industry-leading status in coal production, any of the repercussions of the Wildcat Coal Lodge naming will trickle down to Union County.

### ***Conclusion***

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October 2012.

Festivals and place names are two powerful cultural forms of identity expression. They are also two sites where competing identities, rooted in economic, social or environmental conflict, of people in a place have the potential to be either reconciled or intensified in difference. Either way, these performances of cultural identity become more than mere emblems of identity; they become part of the negotiations and struggles over the landscape. In selecting what to celebrate through a festival or commemorate through a name, identities of places, and people in those places, become solidified through the cultural expressions; through this solidification, other identities *not* explicitly named have the potential to be erased, except when effort is made to incorporate them.

The participation in and sponsorship of River View Coal in recent Union County Corn Festivals is part of the ongoing reconciliation of the county's corn and coal cultures. This symbiotic coal-corn partnership symbolizes the nuanced negotiation that has been reached between coal and corn in Union County by the early twenty-first century, despite the continued potential for intense conflicts surrounding ownership and use of land. Examples of how these negotiations have and are continuing to unfold on the landscape are detailed in the final chapter. While it would be a gross overstatement to claim that Union County has perfectly resolved its corn and coal identities, at least frameworks and pathways have been established for smoothing the relationship between them.

The controversy over the naming of Wildcat Coal Lodge demonstrates how much reconciliation work Kentucky still must do in regards to its coal identity—specifically reconciling its coal past with its coal present and future. The issues at hand in this as-of-

now failed identity negotiation are at once of more and equal complexity than the situation in Union County. The coal past of Kentucky is not homogeneous across the commonwealth—the differences in the landscape between the Eastern and Western coalfields have meant different mining practices and different types of environmental and social conflicts. Reconciling conflict over the identity of a population of 3 million (commonwealth-wide) is also vastly more complicated than over a population of 15,000. Nevertheless, in Union County, the pull of two strong identities—agricultural and mining—both intimately tied to the physical landscape and competing at times for its use, requires a differently complex type of negotiation than coal versus not coal. While successful negotiation of coal and corn identities in Union County seems possible, it is unclear such reconciliation is possible between those who do and do not desire a coal identity for Kentucky.

## **Chapter 6: The Contemporary Hybrid Energy Landscape— Negotiations and Innovations**

By the late 1970s, the basic structures of the contemporary hybrid energy landscape of Union County were in place. The farms that redeveloped after the Camp Breckinridge land sale had matured, and merged with the rest of the county's farming landscape. The new mines and washing plants in the former camp area were either already active or well under construction, and mines in other parts of the county continued to operate. The long coal conveyor belt line continued to run from the center of the camp mine complex to the Ohio River, along with the other, shorter lines that also moved coal to the river and between mines. The last two decades of twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first century brought much similar development in the hybrid energy landscape, as new mines and belt lines were constructed and new agricultural technology was adopted, while the county's economy continued to center around agriculture and mining.

The contemporary hybrid energy landscape has involved several new developments in the way Union Countians inhabit the land, conflicting over and negotiating it. These changes have been the result of both the collective experience of decades and engagement with national concerns and movements. The processes of construction, growth, and change in the hybrid energy landscape have also created their own artifacts of the past, which in some cases are being brought out of abandonment and back into use with reimagined functions. Both the long history of consistency in Union

County's hybrid energy landscape and its adaptability lend Union County to consideration in terms of sustainability, and what it means there.

Several key moments are representative of the past 35 years of activity in the hybrid energy landscape in Union County. They give a sense of how Union Countians not only formed the landscape through their energy source-producing activities, but also responded to the forms that the landscape had taken. Some of the instances described here were significant for those across Union County involved in energy and mining, whereas others represent very specific and localized practices being carried out by individuals, which are nevertheless indicative of the types of hybrid energy landscape development that is happening around the county.

#### ***1978: A year of reaction and organization***

TVA's 1978 acquisition of nearly 1,000 acres of prime farmland for a coal washing plant described at the end of Chapter 4 brought to the forefront the potential for the loss of prime agricultural land in Union County. The earlier land acquisitions by government agencies, for the camp in the 1940s and for the TVA belt line a decade earlier, still resonated in the county. While the construction of the belt line had been disruptive to farmers, that structure took no more than a dozen acres from any one landowner, and so had not been as shocking to the county as a whole. Though attempts to prevent the washing plant were unsuccessful, the land acquisition and the beginning of its construction helped to galvanize organized public reaction to attempts to acquire land for new ventures that were perceived not to provide direct benefit, and in fact held the

potential to bring potential harm, to Union County. The washing plant turned out to be only the first of several proposals for the construction of new industrial infrastructure in 1978, the combination of and reaction to which made the year key in the history and development of Union County's hybrid energy landscape.

In June 1978, Big Rivers Electric Cooperative, based in Henderson, made public that 2,000 acres of land along the Ohio River near Uniontown in Union County comprised one of four sites it was considering for a new coal-fired power plant. Rural electric cooperatives have the power of eminent domain under Kentucky law.<sup>1</sup> The potentially affected property owners, along with other concerned citizens in the Uniontown area and throughout Union County, began meeting and organizing immediately to express their disapproval of the power plant. While loss of productive farmland and the anticipation that prices offered by Big Rivers would be well below the land's value were major concerns, opposition was also based around the potential environmental and public health impacts of the plant. The proposed plant included scrubbers to reduce the sulfur emissions from burning coal; Union Countians were disturbed by the planned application of solid sludge from the scrubbers to the land for reclamation and contouring. They were also concerned about residents of Uniontown and the rest of the county being particularly vulnerable to air pollution from the plant.<sup>2</sup> Maurice Willett, who farmed in the area under consideration and emerged as the spokesperson for those who anticipated having their land taken for the plant, invited

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1 KRS 279.110, *Kentucky Business Organizations, Laws and Rules Annotated, 2013-2013 Edition*.

2 Tyler Mumford, "Big Rivers Eyes Union County Site," *Union County Advocate*, 14 June 1978.

comparisons between Paradise in Muhlenberg County, the site of a coal-fired TVA power plant, and the subject of the John Prine song quoted in Chapter 1, and what could potentially happen to Uniontown if the plant was built. Willett said he had driven to Muhlenberg looking for the small town, and when he got there, “I never found Paradise. They said it was gone. The same thing could happen to Uniontown.”<sup>3</sup>

County-wide opposition to the plant swelled rapidly, as represented by the actions of local elected officials. The Union County Fiscal Court, including magistrates from across the county, unanimously endorsed a motion to oppose the Big Rivers plant. The Uniontown City Council, Morganfield City Council, and Union County Farm Bureau all also went on record in opposition.<sup>4</sup> Boards of Directors of two Union County banks voted to oppose the plant. The resolution from Union Bank and Trust stated:

The land sought to be taken is prime Union County agriculture land. In the past there has been an erosion of Union County land for non-agriculture purposes, which has been partly responsible for the explosion of land prices in Union County, which would make it almost impossible for the displaced farmers to replace their lands in the county.<sup>5</sup>

This added another dimension to the argument in opposition to the plant, and one that was based in the reality of what had happened when land was taken for Camp Breckinridge.

Union Countians opposed to the Big Rivers plant showed sophistication in

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3 “Magistrates oppose Big Rivers plan for generating station,” *Union County Advocate*, 28 June 1978; “Big Rivers plant opponents organize,” *Union County Advocate*, 30 August 1978.

4 “Magistrates oppose Big Rivers plan for generating station,” *Union County Advocate*, 28 June 1978; “Proposed power plant opposed by coouncilmen” *Union County Advocate* 12 July 1978; John Munford, “Hearing on Big Rivers plant is this Thursday,” *Union County Advocate*, 27 September 1978.

5 “Banks oppose Big Rivers,” *Union County Advocate*, 27 September 1978.



coordinating and organizing, not only by drawing support and action from local governing bodies and financial institutions, but also in planning out the steps of their opposition as they would proceed through every step of the plant's approval, which they did in late July 1978. As Big Rivers planned to obtain federal funding for the plant, local leaders planned reports to federal officials that highlighted the proposed site's classification by the Soil Conservation Service as "prime agricultural land" and production statistics that showed one-third of Kentucky's grain production occurred in Union County. They also planned to bombard all of the involved permitting agencies with opposition, including the Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency.<sup>6</sup> In late August, the potentially affected landowners further formalized their own efforts by organizing a group they called the Committee for the Preservation of Farmland and Environment. This sort of support and structured action, including local governing bodies, differs considerably from the mixed reactions from government officials and mostly piecemeal organization of opposition that surrounded the appropriation of land for Camp Breckinridge, and the individual and the scattered lawsuits involved in the acquisition of land for the belt line. In other counties under consideration for the plant, there was not such consensus; in McLean County, for example, the County Farm Bureau organization opposed the plant, but the City of Livermore Chamber of Commerce and City Council were in favor of it.<sup>7</sup> Opposition to

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6 "Landowners gearing up for Big Rivers Meeting," *Union County Advocate*, 2 August 1978.

7 "McLean Farm Bureau Opposes Big Rivers," *Union County Advocate*, 20 September 1978. It is also to be noted that there was generally support in Breckinridge County for siting the plant at Cloverport. "Environmental concerns may dictate site," *Union County Advocate*, 8 November 1978.

the Big Rivers plant also differed from some of the opposition to the TVA washing plant in that Union Countians sought alliances with others concerned with air quality and potential support from the EPA. EPA air quality regulations had been blamed for necessitating the washing plant and the loss of farm land due to its construction.<sup>8</sup>

The tide of opposition overwhelmed the late-September 1978 public hearing on the proposed plant held by Big Rivers and the Rural Electrification Administration in Uniontown; in addition to the hundreds of local opponents in attendance, a practicing radiologist from Henderson, a city attorney from Evansville, Indiana, and a chemistry professor from Indiana State University spoke against the plant, on the basis of its potential effects on the environment and public health.<sup>9</sup> Whether because of the extraordinary opposition to the plant, or other factors, Union Countians were relieved in mid-1979, when Big Rivers announced that the new plant would be sited in Ohio County, near Centertown.<sup>10</sup> Union County's hybrid energy landscape remained focused on the production of energy sources, and not the generation of electricity.

The construction of the TVA washing plant and the possibility of a power plant were not the only energy landscape land use conflicts in 1978. Well-known regional highway contractor and resident of Livingston County, Jim Smith, applied to Kentucky's Bureau of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement for the right to strip mine 90 acres of land between Sullivan and Sturgis in June 1978. While there had been little land

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8 "EPA is expensive" (editorial), *Union County Advocate*, 7 June 1978.

9 "Thanks for the Help" (editorial), *Union County Advocate*, 4 October 1978; "Opponents blast plant plan," *Union County Advocate*, 4 October 1978.

10 "Union County spared," *Union County Advocate*, 18 July 1979.

ever strip mined in Union County, it had been over 15 years since there had been any sort of surface mining activity.<sup>11</sup> The last strip mining activity in the county had also been near Sullivan, and Smith claimed that he had not approached the owners of the surface land about mining, but rather they had approached him.<sup>12</sup> The magistrates of the Union County Fiscal Court voted 4-1 to oppose the mine, the one dissenter being a coal miner himself. One magistrate noted that his opposition was based on “the county’s strong agricultural background” as well as “coal truck transportation and ecological considerations.” In 1970, magistrates had voted to adopt a resolution that prohibited strip mining anywhere in Union County, in support of a similar resolution being adopted in Henderson County, but the legality of neither resolution had been tested in court.<sup>13</sup> In the formal letter that County Judge Bob Hite wrote to Kentucky’s Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, he stated that the Fiscal Court was “opposed to strip mining of any sort in Union County because of the adverse effect on agriculture.”<sup>14</sup> The Union County Planning Commission also opposed Smith’s strip mining plan, and published a long piece in the *Advocate* entitled “Union County’s future: an agricultural or mining community.” The article attributed Union County’s high productivity in both agriculture and coal production to the fact almost all of the county’s mining had been underground, and cited numerous studies on the adverse affects of strip mining and its potential negative impacts on agriculture. The Planning Commission proposed that

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11 “Land near Sullivan is site for proposed strip mine,” *Union County Advocate*, 7 June 1978.

12 “Smith expects strip mine approval,” *Union County Advocate*, 14 June 1978.

13 “Court Contests Mining Plans,” *Union County Advocate*, 14 June 1978.

14 “Adverse agricultural effect cited in letter opposing strip mining,” *Union County Advocate*, 21 June 1978.

Union County is at the crossroads at which it must now decide if it will remain an agricultural county that represents the pride of Kentucky agriculture. Local citizens and government officials need to carefully measure the short lived economic benefits of strip mining against the significant changes in the local environment, occupations and individual life styles.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the opposition of county governing bodies, Smith did receive the permit to mine, and began extracting coal in November 1978.<sup>16</sup> Other than the letter from the Union County Fiscal Court, the Bureau of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement only received “two or three” other letters, which presented opposition to strip mining in general rather than to the details of the plan proposed by Smith.<sup>17</sup> Though Smith was successful in opening the mine, he was unsuccessful in multiple attempts to build a coal loading dock at varying locations in Caseyville, Mulfordtown, and Dekoven. Though on a smaller scale than against the Big Rivers plant, groups of county residents organized, gained support of local government, and involved Kentucky and federal agencies in their opposition.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the Planning Commission's concern that Union County's agricultural identity and productivity would be destroyed by Smith's mine, both remained intact. The mining operation did not expand beyond the planned acreage, and lasted only a few years. The strip mined land, which totals fewer acres than most of the county's individual fields of corn, is a slight anomaly on the landscape, as its light grass cover contrasts with the grain fields, lush pasture, and treed land surrounding it; however, it and the few other

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15 “Union County's future: an agricultural or mining community,” *Union County Advocate*, 5 July 1978.

16 Photo caption, *Union County Advocate*, 22 November 1978.

17 “Strip mining to return to county,” *Union County Advocate*, 16 August 1978.

18 From June 1978 through June 1979, articles on the proposed coal loading docks were featured in the *Advocate* nearly every week.

patches of stripped land in the county are hardly noticeable unless one seeks them out. Smith's mine, now out of operation for three decades, was the last surface mining to occur in Union County.

The land use conflicts of 1978 reinvigorated earlier efforts by the County Planning Commission and others to adopt a county-wide zoning program. While county zoning would not have prevented the TVA washing plant or the proposed Big Rivers power plant due to powers of eminent domain, it could have had impacts in both the strip mining and loading dock cases. County sentiment against rural zoning prevailed, primarily based on fears that farmers and other rural landowners would lose property rights because of it, causing the magistrates to vote to stop the Planning Commission from hosting formal hearings the subject.<sup>19</sup> There is still no countywide zoning in Union County in 2014.

### ***1980s, 1990s, and the Highland Mine belt line***

Through the 1980s, contract negotiations with unions, mine fires, surplus production, and other local, regional, and national coal industry issues resulted in periods of scattered mine layoffs. Nevertheless, coal mining remained a significant employer and dominant economic force in Union County. Union County remained Kentucky's leading producer of corn and generally maintained a strong farm economy. Economic loss was suffered by several dozen Union County farmers in 1982, as well as farmers in other counties, when it was revealed that Wathen's Elevators, Inc., in Henderson, had been

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<sup>19</sup> John Munford, "Court backs down on countywide zoning," *Union County Advocate*, 19 July 1978.

writing bad checks and accepting farmers' grain without having the financial resources to pay for it, as part of its deep financial troubles. The elevator also refused to return grain in storage that it could not pay for back to the farmers. The Wathens owed some Union County farmers as much as \$100,000. After nearly three years of litigation, farmers received 50 cents on the dollar of what the failed elevator owed them.<sup>20</sup> The 1985 Farm Bill had implications for many in County, as it imposed new regulations on farmed wetlands, which constituted a significant portion of land in Union County, particularly in the Ohio River bottoms areas. While farmers were allowed to continue growing crops on these areas, they were prohibited from conducting any additional or new drainage work on them, such as tiling. As was described in Chapters 2 and 4, field drainage work has long been a part of how Union Countians interact with their landscape and employ new agricultural technologies to improve their farm's productivity.

In 1990, Island Creek's Hamilton 2 and Ohio 11 mines and Hamilton 1 preparation plant remained in operation, along with Peabody-operated mines in the camp complex, and smaller mines operated by Pyro in the Sullivan-Caseyville-Dekoven area. At the end of 1990, mining operations employed over 2,000 people in Union County.<sup>21</sup> In 1990, however, a new set of amendments was added to the Clean Air Act, which

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<sup>20</sup> "Elevator's financial problems may cost farmers \$2 million," *Union County Advocate*, 17 March 1982; "Farmers stunned by Wathens' acquittal," *Union County Advocate*, 19 January 1983; "Grain elevator saga ruined family, farmers," *Henderson Gleaner*, 13 January 2008. While some like to speculate that farming operations were ruined or went bankrupt because of the Wathens, I have not found examples of any in Union County. This is perhaps due to the general financial strength and history of good financial practices and risk management strategies among farmers there. My immediate family's own recently-expanded farming operation in Henderson and Webster Counties was significantly affected by the Wathen's Elevator situation, but also survived.

<sup>21</sup> Linda Robinson, "Mining one of largest employers," *Union County Advocate*, 30 January 1991.

increased imperatives and initiatives for reducing acid rain. As Kentucky's Western Coalfields region's coal has higher sulfur content than coal in western U.S. states, these amendments had the potential to threaten the demand for Union County coal, unless the Tennessee Valley Authority installed scrubbers on its Cumberland Power Plant and other steam plants which did not already have them. There was extraordinary anxiety in the mining community and Union County as a whole until TVA announced in October that it would install scrubbers at Cumberland and also continue using Union County coal at the Paradise plant.<sup>22</sup>

By mid-1992, the coal reserves at Peabody's Camp 2 mine had been depleted after producing over 25 million tons of coal, and the mine had to be shut down.<sup>23</sup> The end of 1992 also brought the closing of the Hamilton 2 mine, due to conditions in the national coal economy, which resulted in the layoff of 250 employees.<sup>24</sup> The season of instability of mining employment in Union County led some to consider adding a new dimension to the county's hybrid energy landscape that promised to create several hundred jobs, a nuclear waste disposal facility. Despite mixed local support, and after great associated controversy, in mid-1992, the Union County Fiscal Court repeatedly voted to reject encouragement from the Department of Energy to apply for funds for a feasibility study of potential county sites for holding waste.<sup>25</sup>

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22 Kenny Barkley, "TVA recommends installing scrubbers," *Union County Advocate*, 16 October 1991.

23 "Peabody Says Camp 2 Will Be Closing," *Union County Advocate* 1 May 1991; Kenny Barkley, "150 will be idled at Camp No. 2; reduction part of mine closing," *Union County Advocate*, 23 October 1991.

24 "Hamilton 2 mine being idled; 250 affected," *Union County Advocate*, 14 October 1992.

25 "County says no once again to nuclear facility," *Union County Advocate*, 24 June 1992. Articles on the possibility of the facility appeared in nearly every issue of the *Advocate* from June through September 1992. Letters to the editor appearing in the *Advocate* around this time show that Union Countians were aware of the issues at Yucca Mountain and other proposed and existing nuclear waste disposal sites, e.g.

Despite the cuts, mining continued to be a strong part of Union County's economy. In particular, Peabody continued to operate the camp complex mines through the 1990s, supplying coal to the Tennessee Valley Authority. The future of coal mining temporarily looked bleak in Spring 2000, as the Camp 1 mine was slated for closure at the end of the year, and the Camp 11 mine's coal reserve were predicted to be depleted by 2002. In May 2000, Peabody announced that it would construct a new mine in Union and Henderson Counties, Highland Mine, that would employ over 200 people and fulfill existing long-term contracts with TVA.<sup>26</sup> The mine required 54 surface acres in Union County for its opening, and would ultimately sit under 4,153 acres in Union and 3,177 acres in Henderson Counties.<sup>27</sup> By March 2003, Highland Mine had started coal production.

For the Highland Mine to make use of the existing washing and preparation plant in the camp mine complex, and the existing miles of belt line from the plant to Peabody's river terminal, Peabody had to construct a new 5 mile long coal conveyor belt line.<sup>28</sup> While the *Advocate* covered Peabody's requests to the Union County Fiscal Court for easements to cross two county roads with the belt line, the local newspaper did not provide the same intensive coverage of land acquisition for the new line as it had for the

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Michael Moore, "Let the people make up their minds," *Union County Advocate*, 1 July 1992. See Valerie Kuletz, *The Tainted Desert: Environmental Ruin in the American West* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

26 "Peabody announces new mine; Jenkins fears severance tax loss," *Union County Advocate*, 24 May 2000.

27 Paul Monsour, "Highland Mine will have surface acres in county," *Union County Advocate*, 8 November 2000.

28 "Peabody's Highland Mine in operation with four million tons of coal a year," *Union County Advocate*, 12 March 2003.



original long TVA-Peabody belt line in 1969.<sup>29</sup> Yet, landowners still contested the new belt line.

Marilyn Greenwell and her husband are among the farmers whose property the belt line crosses; while the Greenwell family has farmed in Union County for several generations, the particular high quality cropland crossed by the belt line had been part of Camp Breckinridge, and they purchased it in 1965. Marilyn describes that when Peabody initially began acquiring land for the belt line, the company's "Land Man" came to offer them a price for a 30 year rental on their land, and her family did not believe the price actually reflected the value of the land. As Marilyn noted,

I really wasn't interested in a beltline because I didn't have any drapes in my den or my sunroom, because we actually like to look at our farm, which we sit in the middle of, and his actual quote to me was, "We'll buy you drapes."

The Land Man told the Greenwells that everyone else along the belt line route was signing up with no problems, and accepting the money; however, as two Greenwell brothers-in-law also had property in the path of the beltline, Marilyn's family knew this was incorrect. After several unsuccessful meetings about the price to be paid for the land, the Land Man told the Greenwells that Peabody would simply take the land through eminent domain; however, Marilyn's daughter, a lawyer, noted that this was not applicable because Peabody was operating as a private coal company, not on behalf of TVA. After several months, when Peabody and the Greenwells met in court, the coal company asked to speak with the family before proceedings began, and offered to settle with them for the amount the Greenwells had originally requested, plus Peabody paid all

<sup>29</sup> "Court hears Highland to open in 6 months," *Union County Advocate*, 10 April 2002.

court and the family's legal fees. As Marilyn, stated, “We felt that even though they got their belt line, we got the money.”<sup>30</sup>

Despite their financial gain, the Greenwells still feel the effects of the beltline in their daily lives and farming operations. In addition to the visual impact, they experience noise “like a far off helicopter,” or worse when bearings are broken, and dust from unwashed coal. The line bisects their farm with a right-of-way and a gravel road that is heavily traveled by both mine personnel and the trespassing general public, which has caused a problem they never had to worry about before, “traffic in our corn field.” Though underpasses were constructed to allow the passage of combines and tractors, the belt line has still changed the boundaries of fields and how they move around their land. As Marilyn summarized, “It's just not a pastoral scene out here any more.”

Despite countywide organizing on other issues in the preceding years, conflict over land use for a coal conveyor belt line took somewhat the same form in 2000 as it had 30 years before. Without the power of eminent domain wielded by government agencies, however, landowners like the Greenwells have had more equal footing on which to help determine the terms on which their land would be used. While the beltline is an unwanted presence on their farms, they receive compensation that at least approximates the cost they assigned to its intrusion.

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30 Marilyn Greenwell , conversation with the author on the Greenwell farm in Waverly, 12 August 2009. Notes in author's possession.

### **2008-2014+: River View Mine**

The September 2009 dedication and opening ceremony of the River View Mine at Uniontown was described in Chapter 5. Throwing a festival-like party with food, giveaways, and celebrity appearances was only a logical, and comparatively superficial, next step in the series of decisions made by River View's parent company Alliance Resource Partners to facilitate strong connections between the mine and the Union County community. While the infrastructure of River View Mine now dominates the area of the county just outside of Uniontown, the mine has also become thoroughly integrated into Union County life and culture.

The Alliance Vice President overseeing River View had strong ties to Union County, and chose to hire Heath Lovell, a Union County native and current resident, as General Manager.<sup>31</sup> This was in sharp contrast to the management choice made by Peabody when Highland Mine opened, which was to put a longtime Austailian Peabody executive with no connections to Union County in charge.<sup>32</sup> Lovell and Alliance made the decision to staff the first wave of 200 miners at River View with people who lived in Union County but had been commuting to work at mines in other counties in Kentucky and in Illinois and preferred to work closer to home.<sup>33</sup> River View hired a well-respected local woman, Kim Humphries, to head its public relations department, and through her efforts and the efforts of others in the company, River View quickly became a substantial

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31 Carrie Dillard, "Riverview Coal, full steam ahead," *Union County Advocate*, 13 February 2008.

32 "Craig to oversee Highland Mine," *Union County Advocate* 14 February 2001.

33 Heath Lovell oral history, conducted by Sarah Brown, Uniontown, KY, 10 July 2009, Western Kentucky Coal Mining Oral History Project, Kentucky Historical Society.

financial supporter of school and community activities, including the Corn Festival, as discussed in Chapter 5.

River View located its washing and preparation plant on the site where a similar structure sat for the Ohio 11 mine, close to the Ohio River, with a short conveyor belt line to move coal from the plant to the barges. A 3 mile long overland belt moves the coal from the mine to the plant.<sup>34</sup> River View is mining both the No. 9 and No. 11 coal seams simultaneously, possible because of 120 feet of interburden between them. Though River View also controls the deeper No. 7 seam, and their site is one of the only places in Kentucky where it is thick enough to mine, they do not intend to mine it until there is market demand for it. The mine is considered a marvel of high productivity in the coal industry.<sup>35</sup>

As opposed to the hills of coal processing waste in the camp complex, which are almost entirely surrounded by farm fields and hence only visible at a distance from the county's major roads, permanent waste storage for the River View Mine waste sits close to and visible from three county roads. Since River View began mining coal in 2009, the surface of this area has gone from gently rolling land in keeping with the fields around it, to a hill taller than all of its surroundings (Figure 6.1). It has the potential to grow to be one of the highest points in the county. This new “gob pile” is located on land that formerly belonged to Union County farmer Randy Greenwell (no close relation to Marilyn's family), and that sits across the road and in direct view of the large new home

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34 Carrie Dillard, “Riverview Coal, full steam ahead,” *Union County Advocate*, 13 February 2008.

35 Lee Buchsbaum, “Riverview—The Most Productive Continuous Miner Mine,” *Coal Age*, 29 July 2011.

that his family had just moved into when construction of the mine began. When River View approached him about purchasing his land for waste storage, Randy simply stated that he did not want his family home looking out on the mound of coal waste. Through negotiations, Randy agreed to sell the land only if the coal company also purchased the new home, which Randy continues to farm around. The Greenwells constructed a newer new home in a site without a view of mine activity.<sup>36</sup> Throughout this process, Randy negotiated as a near-equal with River View mine.



*Figure 6.1: River View gob pile as viewed from standing in the back of a pickup truck in a neighboring cornfield.*

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<sup>36</sup> Randy Greenwell, conversation with the author at the Greenwell Farm Shop in Union County, 31 July 2013. Notes in author's possession.

### ***2013: Reinvisioning Mine Infrastructure***

With the closing in the 1980s, 90s, and early 2000s of most of the flurry of mines that had opened in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there is a considerable amount of now-unused mining infrastructure left on the surface of the land. While these structures and sites could reasonably be viewed as fully dormant blights of industrial waste, they are still functioning actively in Union County's hybrid energy landscape. At a most basic level, they serve as artifacts of Union County's mining past which can help to understand the development of the county's landscape; when visible from the road, they are occasionally even destination points for those engaged in a variety of mining or industrial tourism that involves finding such sites, photographing them, and sharing the pictures and written observations on webpages. Some of the structures, despite their now-dilapidated states, are still considered to be on reserve and possibly restorable should a coal company make the decision to reopen any of the mines to use new technologies to extract more coal. In some cases, these sites and structures are finding new and hybrid uses.

Two examples of hybrid and negotiated uses of otherwise idle mine site infrastructure come from the farm of Willard Greenwell and his sons (no close relation to Randy's or Marilyn's families). Willard, now in his mid-80s, has been farming in Union County essentially his entire life, but has particularly built his own land base in the past 40 years. His family's farm fields now nearly surround the site of the entrance to the closed Hamilton Mine 2. A coal storage silo still towers over the land, rusting metal buildings still stand, and a decaying but still brightly-painted belt line still sits between

this site and the also-long-idle Hamilton 1 processing plant and mine entrance. Willard's farming operation has for several years parked farm machinery in the parking lot of the former mine, immediately next to the large silo. This agreement works out well for both the mining company and the Greenwells, as they have both a convenient place to store his machinery and access to a large, flat area which makes such activities as transferring fertilizer into spreaders easier, while the mining company has someone who mows the site and watches over it to deter trespassers and vandalism. Greenwell anticipates that if the current mining company that owns the property ever decides to sell the property, he and his family will be given the first option to purchase it. Though he could not recall an exact location, and I have not been able to verify that such a site exists, Willard has heard rumors that a former coal silo like the one at this site is being used to store grain elsewhere in Western Kentucky. Though Willard maintains several complexes of grain bins that include multiple of the largest grain storage structures that are built on private farms, he looked wistfully at the coal silo when speaking about the idea of converting it into grain storage, as its capacity far exceeds that of his largest bins (Figure 6.2).



*Figure 6.2: Willard Greenwell's farm equipment parked by out-of-commission coal silo.*

The negotiated landscape is also evident on Greenwell land in the former camp area. While Willard Greenwell did not purchase the farm directly from the coal company after the mine was closed, he purchased it from the farmer who did. The buildings associated with a mine entrance, including offices, bathhouse facilities, storage, and loading areas for the belt line remained on the farm; the previous owner had done little with them. Since purchasing the land, the Greenwells have worked to convert the old mine buildings into usable farm buildings. With most of the interior partitions and equipment such as toilets and showers removed, and filled with combines, headers,



sprayers, and other farm machinery and implements, the mine buildings are now virtually indistinguishable from farm buildings. The few remnants of their original purpose, such as the track which held carts of coal and a hoist which used to lift those carts, still sit among the equipment as reminders of the dramatic transformation in the use of the space (See Figure 6.3). Snaking across the landscape from the old mine entrance buildings toward the preparation plant is the signature of the former belt line. While none of the physical structure remains, the road bed that ran along the line is still visible, and continues to separate fields for much of its length, a grassy strip with two worn tracks between fields of crops.



*Figure 6.3: Former mine entrance buildings now functioning as farm buildings on the farm of Willard Greenwell.*

Willard's relationship with abandoned coal infrastructure has not entirely consisted of creative repurposings. A field he owns in the bottom land of the camp area,

and which he had tiled to maximize its cropability, experienced dramatic subsidence that became noticeable in Spring 2013. Half of the field, positioned over chambers of a former mine, sank to over a foot lower than the rest of the field. When I visited the field in August 2013, spools of plastic drainage tile and heavy machinery had been moved in by the coal company still responsible for surface effects due to their mining activity, and retiling and other manipulations of Willard's field to return it crop production were about to begin.<sup>37</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

The last few decades have included many developments in Union County's hybrid energy landscape. In response to proposed appropriations of farm land for non-agricultural purposes, Union County residents have taken actions ranging from political organization to head-to-head legal battles to on-the-ground negotiations, and mostly succeeded in guiding the hybrid energy landscape in a direction that has allowed for coal development without significantly compromising farm production and lifeways. While Willard Greenwell's creative repurposing of old mining facilities has transformed what might be considered industrial blight into part of a successful farming operation, the ongoing adaptability throughout both farming and mining operations in Union County is an indication that the hybrid energy landscape has the potential to flourish well into the future.

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37 Willard Greenwell, conversation with the author at his farm sites around Union County, 6 August 2013. Notes in author's possession.

## Conclusion: An Enduring Landscape

In their book, *Hubris and Hybrids: A Cultural History of Technology and Science*, Mikael Hård and Andrew Jamison employ the concept of “cultural appropriation” in conceptualizing the adoption of technologies over time into established ways of life. Through the process of cultural appropriation, “novelty is brought under control” through the “mixing of different practical skills and knowledge traditions, of social roles and competencies, of visions and practices.” In cultural appropriation of technology, “dialectical stories” of hybridization and combination replace both heroic narratives of great innovators bringing gifts of technology to the masses and the narratives of exploitation wherein industrial capitalism employs technology to pillage and destroy environments and cultures.<sup>1</sup>

Union County's 200 years of adaptations to the changing technologies of coal and corn production are a narrative of cultural appropriation. While there have been periods of time, such as when the Camp Breckinridge lands were taken and when the TVA-Peabody coal conveyor belt line was initially constructed, when new infrastructure and technologies brought radical change to the Union County landscape, and hardship to landowners in some portions of the county, ultimately the population and landscape of Union County as a whole has continually adapted itself through cultural appropriation and pushing back to force adaptation from and of the new infrastructure and technologies.

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<sup>1</sup> Mikael Hård and Andrew Jamison, *Hubris and Hybrids: A Cultural History of Technology and Science* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 4.

In other words, both coal and corn in Union County have endured through the resilient adaptability of the hybrid energy landscape.

While by no means ancient, a community that has inhabited, developed, and maintained a hybrid energy landscape over 200 years is worth considering as a model for endurance and perhaps even sustainability. Though large-scale mechanized row crop agriculture and underground coal mining are typically at the bottom of the list of sustainable economic activities in terms of their environmental impact, in Union County farming and mining have neither gone extinct nor suffered extreme boom and bust economic cycles as they have in other places, or left the physical environment in ruin. They have, overall, been part of a consistently maintained basic way of life in Union County.

While the basic principles of sustainability—environmental responsibility, economic viability, and social equity—derived from the Brundtland Report and subsequent scholarship must not be ignored in evaluating past and current communities and landscapes, the “fourth pillar” of cultural vitality should be considered equally with these. Environment, economy, and social justice cannot be evaluated or adapted without also considering ways of life, values, meanings, relationships, and identities.<sup>2</sup> Union County's enduring hybrid energy landscape serves as an example of how adaptation (through Hård and Jamison's cultural appropriation) has facilitated and been facilitated by cultural sustainability. The combination of adaptation and cultural sustainability has

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2 *Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, United Nations (1987); Joe Hawkes, *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning* (Victoria, Australia: Cultural Development Network, 2001)

allowed Union County to respond to, negotiate, and endure dramatic changes in both agriculture, mining, and other land uses.

Factoring cultural vitality or way of life into conceptions of sustainability necessitates looking locally. It is a version of sustainability that appreciates systems that have thrived and continued to thrive within very specific conditions and landscapes. While the global implications of local behaviors should still be given consideration in this approach, global solutions, particularly ones that involve radical changes in practices and behaviors, have the potential to wrench the system out of balance, as they threaten the way of life. Similarly, the local systems and solutions that have repeatedly proven to be adaptable and enduring in one situation may fail in a different landscape and under different conditions, and thus should be generalized only with great care. What is generalizable is the need to consider sustainability at an intensely local scale, so that cultural vitality and way of life can be part of the discussion.

Because of the demonstrated cultural sustainability and capacity of cultural appropriation in the Union County farming and mining communities, there is perhaps not a need to be concerned about an apocalyptic future in which both agriculture and coal mining collapse. Despite maintaining corn and coal at its core, there has been far more change than consistency in Union County, and the county has again and again proven its ability to adapt to this change. The energy sources produced in Union County may eventually change over time, but this change is likely to be incremental and in keeping with the culture of the county. As a key element of the county's culture is its habitation of

a hybrid energy landscape, it is also likely that these energy sources will be diverse. The legacy of careful and gradual cultural appropriation of new energy technologies means that the resistance to these technologies seen elsewhere may not occur in Union County. In the meantime, the cornfields and the coalfields both remain the center of life in the county.

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